

CINEFANTASTIQUE

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T H E X F I L E S



Volume 28 Number 3



DAVID CRONENBERG'S "CRASH"

D. Voigt

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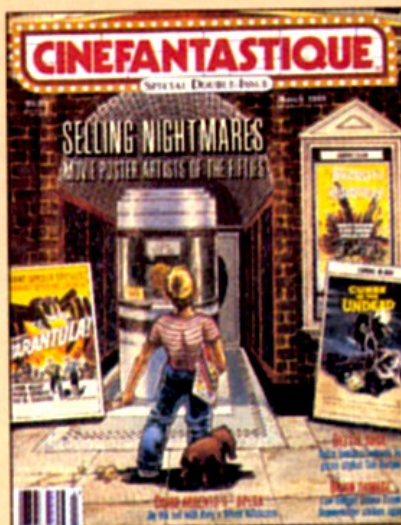
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The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder™

OCTOBER 1996

CINEMAGINATION

You know you've made it, critically speaking, when you have achieved that curious combination of magnetism and Teflon that occurs when good things stick to you and bad things fall away, leaving no trace. In this sense, this issue's cover story subject THE X-FILES, has truly made it.

What brings this thought home clearly is a recent *L.A. Weekly* review of INDEPENDENCE DAY, by Manhola Dargis. Rather unconvincingly, Dargis tries to convince us that "without Mulder and Scully, this unrepentantly hokey, slam-bam extravaganza...wouldn't exist... as the season's most eagerly awaited phenomenon." The premise seems to be that X-FILES somehow primed the national psyche in a way that guaranteed the film's mega-success this summer.

As film critics, we're always trying to put individual films into a larger context that helps us make more sense out of them, but in this case, THE X-FILES connection to ID4 just doesn't work. The film's antecedents, as admitted by Rolland Emmerich and Dean Devlin, are the alien invasion films of the 1950s (watch WAR OF THE WORLDS and EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS again, if you have any doubts), combined with the disaster movies of the '70s. The paranoid conspiracy storyline of THE X-FILES (despite an early dialogue reference in the film) just doesn't relate.

Curiously, this year's previous alien invasion film, THE ARRIVAL, does bear certain similarities, intentional or otherwise, with THE X-FILES (shape-shifting aliens, conspiracy, invasion by stealth, etc). But the film flopped, so Dargis is not rushing to draw any comparisons, because that would be admitting that the show's influence doesn't really affect national boxoffice, and the whole foundation of the review would collapse. Still, it must be nice for Chris Carter and company to know that they've reached the point where they are getting credit for things like this.

Steve Biodrowski



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EAGERLY AWAITED

STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT (Paramount)

STAR TREK: GENERATIONS proved once and for all that Trekkies will go see anything with the name of their favorite franchise plastered on it—no matter how bad it is. Now the sequel is on the way, and one has to pause and wonder whether it will improve on its predecessor. There is reason for hope, fortunately. First off, historically, the odd-numbered TREK features have all been disappointments in one way or another, and the even-numbered ones have been comeback efforts that re-established the validity of the franchise. Also, freed from the obligation of including classic TREK cast members, the new scenario can avoid the contrived plotting of GENERATIONS, in favor of emphasizing the most memorable villains to emerge from the THE NEXT GENERATION television show—the Borg. In this script, by Brannon Braga and Ronald D. Moore, a time-travel premise returns to the Federation's first encounter with the dreaded nemesis. Jonathan Frakes directs himself and the rest of the regulars from the TV cast: Patrick Stewart, LeVar Burton, Michael Dorn, Gates McFadden, Marina Sirtis, and Brent Spiner. Also along for the ride are Alfre Woodard, James Cromwell, and Alice Krige as the Borg Queen.

November 22



RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson
(unless otherwise noted)

BOGUS (Warners)

September 6

Norman Jewison directed this comedy from a script by Alvin Sargeant. Co-starring alongside Whoopi Goldberg (she of the ill-fated THEODORE REX), the fine French actor Gerard Depardieu plays a child's "imaginary" playmate, invisible to those in the adult world. The film briefly flirted with the prospect of a Spring release (CFQ 27:9), then reverted to the original plan of waiting until closer to the holiday season.

CRASH (Fine Line)

1997

New Line's upscale art house division, Fine Line, had been touting a planned October 4 opening in L.A. and New York with advance press screenings of David Cronenberg's latest film. Now the distributor has decided that October will be too crowded (at least in part with some of New Line's own releases, such as THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU); the revised plan calls for release in February or March. James Spader stars in this controversial adaptation of J.G. Ballard's novel, which won a prize at Cannes, even though several members of the celebrity panel of judges refused to support it. SEE PAGE 8.

THE CROW: CITY

OF ANGELS (Dimension) Now Playing

Can J. O'Barr's Gothic graphic novel form the basis of a film franchise, or is this sequel merely treading on a dead man's grave? Now's your chance to decide. SEE CFQ 28:1

GAMERA, GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE (A.D. Visions)

October

The subtitled print of the original Japanese cut has been unreeling in special preview screenings at select theaters around the country. If you haven't been so fortunate as to see this version, soon an English-dubbed version will be getting wider exposure. Don't let your aversion to the old Gamera films put you off seeing this one on the big screen. SEE PAGE 10.

THE GHOST AND THE DARKNESS (Paramount)

October 11

Gale Anne Hurd produced this African adventure, written by William Goldman. Although the "ghost" of the title turns out to be a man-eating tiger, the film's trailer features Michael Douglas and Val Kilmer stalking the beast in a surreal, studio-bound landscape, and the local su-

perstitutions about the beast, revered and feared almost like a god, push this right to the edge of being a genre film. Stephen Hopkins (A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 5: THE DREAM CHILD) directed.

THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU (New Line) Now Playing

The third filmization of H.G. Wells' novel reaches screens at the end of this month. Marlon Brando and Val Kilmer star for director John Frankenheimer. SEE CFQ 28:2:28

LOCH NESS (Gramercy) Now Playing

Ted Danson stars in this \$10 million comedy fantasy from the producers of FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL. Also in the cast are Ian Holm (ALIEN) and Joely Richardson. First-time feature helmer John Henderson directed from a screenplay by John Fusco (CROSSROADS), about a brilliant zoologist (Danson), who has squandered his academic reputation by chasing Bigfoot and the Yeti. As a last chance to redeem his credibility, he is sent to disprove the existence of the famous monster in Loch Ness. Needless to say, he comes to exactly the opposite conclusion regarding "Nessie," thanks to the contributions of Jim Henson's Creature Shop. SEE CFQ 28:2:44



THE RELIC (Paramount)

1997

Producer Gale Ann Hurd's big-budget monster movie was intended to be a major summer event. Well, it will have to be next summer, because now the film won't be coming out until next year. Originally scheduled for a May release, the film was first pushed back to July and then to August, allowing more time to finish the CGI effects for the monster, designed by Stan Winston's company. Now Paramount claims that this summer was too crowded and the film would be better served by a release next year, in January at the earliest. Peter Hyams directed Penelope Ann Miller, Tom Sizemore, Linda Hunt and James Whitmore. SEE CFQ 27:10.

SPECIAL EFFECTS (Imax) Now playing

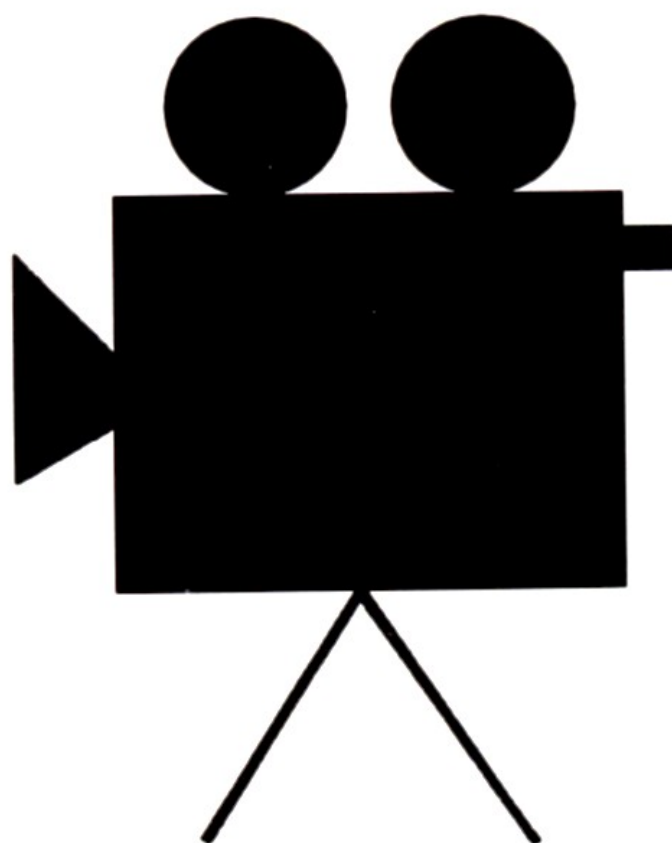
This forty-minute documentary, an episode of PBS's Nova TV series shot in the Imax big screen format, is currently unspooling at Imax specialty theatres around the country. The educational value of this look at special effects is no match for an episode of Discovery Channel's MOVIE MAGIC. However, this is your first opportunity to see ILM's new effects for the revised STAR WARS to be released next year.

MAN BITES DOG

BAD MOON (Warners)

"Adventurous photojournalist" Ted (Michael Pare) responds to the call of the wild in a big way when he is bitten by a "horrific, half-human beast" in the jungles of Nepal. Returning home to his sister (Mariel Hemingway, pictured) and his nephew (Mason Gamble), Ted apparently settles back into life as normal, but strange things begin to happen, including the savage murder of a jogger. Only the family dog, Thor, senses that Ted is no longer the man he was but a beast whose lust for blood is overwhelming his former humanity. Based on the novel *Thor* by Wayne Smith, BAD MOON was written and directed by Eric Red, who earned cult recognition for writing THE HITCHER (1986) and co-writing Kathryn Bigelow's NEAR DARK (1987). His directorial efforts include COHEN AND TATE (1989) and BODY PARTS (1991).

October 25



HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

STOP-MOTION STOPPED

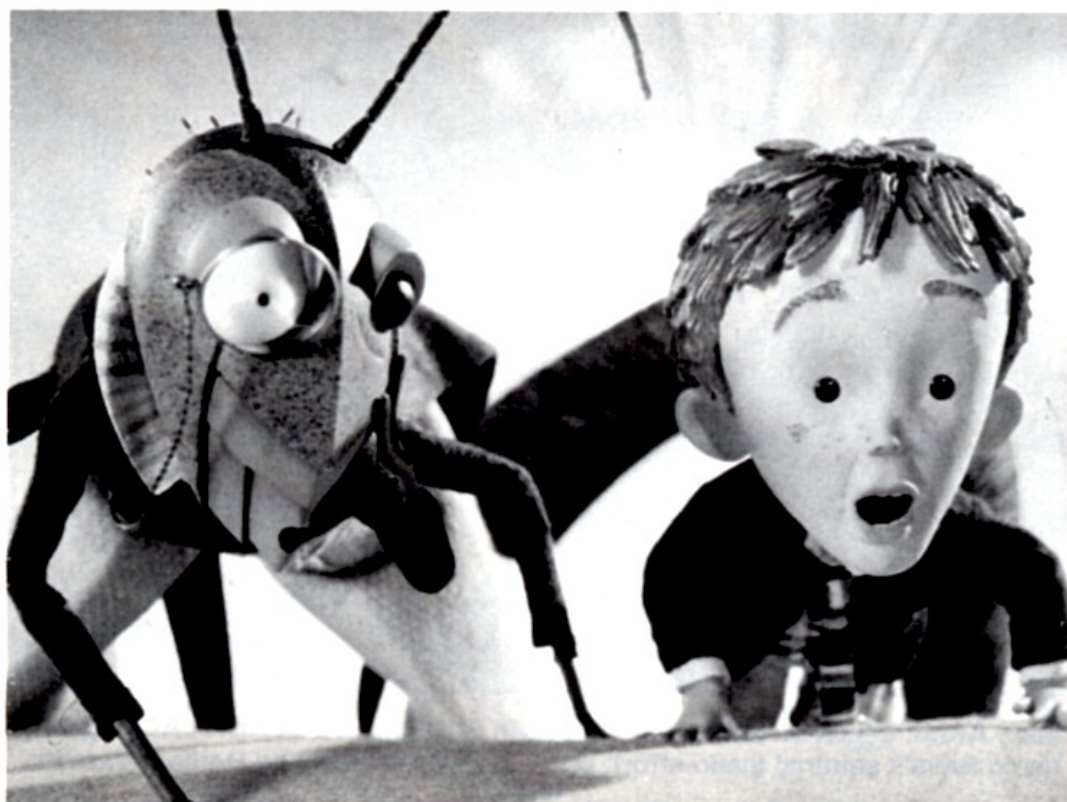
Miramax halts Henry Selick's next film after less than peachy boxoffice.

by Todd Baesen

Last September, Miramax Films announced a multi-picture deal that would provide firm financing and operating costs for future projects from the San Francisco-based stop-motion studios of Henry Selick, the director of *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS* and *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*. Then, shortly before pre-production was slated to begin on Selick's first Miramax project, *TOOTS AND THE UPSIDE DOWN HOUSE*, Miramax abandoned the pacts, leaving Selick and his ambitious slate of stop-motion features temporarily orphaned.

Sources close to the production say that Miramax developed cold feet over the budget for *TOOTS*, which would likely have surpassed the \$30 million mark, making it an extremely risky venture for the Disney-owned company. Boxoffice returns for Selick's *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* obviously played a role in the Miramax decision, for despite positive reviews, the Roald Dahl adaptation was straining to reach a \$30 million dollar U.S. theatrical gross, well short of the \$50 million-plus earned by Selick's collaboration with Tim Burton, *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*. The question now is: can Selick fashion a stop-motion boxoffice hit without the aid of his former, now-estranged mentor?

TOOTS AND THE UPSIDE DOWN HOUSE was being adapted into an animation screenplay by writer-director Steven Soderbergh (*SEX, LIES, AND VIDEOTAPE*), from the forthcoming children's book by Carol Hughes. The story deals with a young girl, Toots, who enters an enchanted stop-motion world—populated with goblins, fairies, and elves—and encounters a decidedly sinister Jack Frost. Like *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*, *TOOTS* would alternate live-action with stop-motion. Selick told *Daily Variety* writer Greg Evans, "The upside down world within Toots' house is wonderfully fantastic, and takes a fresh look at fairies, sprites, and



Henry Selick wanted \$30 million for his next film at Miramax, but *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* (above) has yet to make \$30 million at the boxoffice.

goblins—three words that normally make me shiver with revulsion."

Despite the temporary setback, it's probable that Selick's production company, Twitching Image, will land a deal at another studio shortly, as renewed interest in all forms of animation has brought practically every major studio into a field that was once the exclusive domain of Disney. Dreamworks' Jeffrey Katzenberg would seem to be a

likely suitor, as it was Katzenberg who initially backed *NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS* at Disney and he retains the option on a book, *Schreck*, that Selick would dearly love to film. The question remains whether Disney, who has aggressively pursued deals with its key animators, will sit by and allow a fully functioning stop-motion studio to slip through its corporate fingers. □

Short Notes

Contrary to previous reports, it now appears that **Kurt Russell** will take the lead in *SOLDIER*, the science-fiction western penned by **David Webb Peoples** (*12 MONKEYS*). **Keanu Reeves** had been offered the role, but apparently he's turned his back on action roles, having also rejected *SPEED II*. Don't expect *SOLDIER* any time soon, however; both Russell and director **Paul Anderson** (*MORTAL KOMBAT*) have previous commitments. ☹ **Keanu Reeves**, meanwhile, won't be unemployed; he's been offered \$11 million to star in *DEVIL'S ADVOCATE* as a young lawyer who discovers that his prestigious law firm is run by the Devil. ☹ In keeping with the film from which it takes its name, the new Jurassic Park Ride at Universal Studios, Hollywood, ran into some glitches shortly after it opened in June. The \$110 million attraction was shut down one weekend after at least 100 riders were sprayed with warm hydraulic fluid. Four people were treated at a Burbank hospital for minor injuries and released. ☹ One of their first titles scheduled for theatrical release from Cabin Fever, a homevid company moving into platform distribution, is *SKELETONS*, a horror film from bad boy director **Ken Russell** (*ALTERED STATES*), starring **Ron Silver** (*THE ARRIVAL*). □

NEVERWHERE

by Chuck Wagner

The question with Neil Gaiman was always: When? A seminal talent in the world of illustrated storytelling (*Sandman*, *Black Orchid*, etc.), he has legions of fans who wondered when he would turn to movies or TV.

The answer to that question has proven to be, "Never"—as in *NEVERWHERE*, Neil Gaiman's first work produced for the screen—small or large. Not surprisingly, Gaiman has chosen a fantasy theme for his first television show. Gaiman explained, "I suppose the main thing that prompted the creation of *NEVERWHERE* was that there was no fantasy being made on television for adults."

Written by Gaiman, produced by Clive Brill, and directed by Dewy Humphreys, *NEVERWHERE* creates a Tolkien-esque tableaux in modern London. Beneath the streets of the city there's a world inhabited by monsters and saints, murderers and angels, knights in armor and pale girls in black velvet. It's the Other London. The London of the people who have fallen between the cracks. The inhabitants of the Underside are as diverse, or more so, ethnically and culturally, as the inhabitants of the city far above them. They are a dark reflection of London, like a city reflected in a pool of black water. As the journey through *Neverwhere* progresses, we realize that the characters may be the heroes and the villains, but the city is the star.

Richard Mayhew (Gary Bakewell) is going to find out more than he ever wanted to about London Below. He's a young businessman who finds that one act of kindness, of playing the Good Samaritan, catapults him out of his safe and predictable life, and into a waking nightmare of the world under London. And Mayhew, who wants only to go home, will find a strange destiny waiting for him in the other London: *Neverwhere*.

NEVERWHERE is a six-episode BBC Drama, screening in the UK on BBC 2 in the Autumn. It will also be a novel, to be released by BBC books in Autumn of 1996, and by Avon books in the US in 1997.

Let us hope we in the States get to visit *NEVERWHERE* sooner... rather than never. □

Obituaries

by Jay Stevenson
and David Del Valle

Brigette Helm

The 90-year-old actress died in Switzerland on June 11. She was forever immortalized by Fritz Lang in the silent science-fiction classic METROPOLIS (1926). She played the dual role of the virtuous Maria and her robot-seductress double, created to sew dissent amongst the oppressed workers of the future. Although she appeared in over thirty German films, both silents and talkies, the reluctant actress (who was pushed into the profession by her mother) never recreated this early success, and retired in 1935.

Albert Broccoli

Albert (Cubby) Broccoli, the producer who turned a series of spy novels into one of if not the most successful film franchises of all time, died June 27 in his Beverly Hills home, of a heart-related ailment. Although Ian Fleming's James Bond had gained some international attention when President John F. Kennedy mentioned that he enjoyed the books, it was Broccoli's films, beginning with DR. NO in 1962, which he co-produced with Harry Saltzman,



Mary Arden becomes one of the victims in BLOOD AND BLACK LACE (1964), Mario Bava's seminal giallo effort, soon to be re-released by Rolling Thunder.

man, that made that character world-famous. In the '70s, Broccoli bought out Saltzman and continued the series through to 1995's GOLD-EYE. Broccoli was 87.

Roy Ashton

The English makeup expert, who succeeded Phil Leaky at Hammer Films in the early 1960s, passed away at the age of 85. Although his work was often compared unfavorably to that of Jack Pierce by fans of Universal's '30s and '40s horror classics, he actually created several memorable movie monsters, including THE GORGON (1964) and Oliver Reed's doomed lycanthrope in CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF (1961).

Saul David

The 74-year-old producer died in Culver City this June of complications brought on by congestive heart failure. His genre credits included FANTASTIC VOYAGE, OUR MAN FLINT (both 1966) and IN LIKE FLINT (1967).

William Sylvester

The familiar-faced actor died at the age of 73. He appeared in the greatest science-fiction film of all time, Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. His other genre titles include GORGO (1961), THE

DEVIL DOLL (1964), DEVILS OF DARKNESS (1965), and DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK (1973).

John Abbott

The eccentric British character actor died in June. He was best known to horror fans for his starring roles in THE VAMPIRE'S GHOST (1945) and CRY OF THE WEREWOLF, with Nina Foch. His numerous television appearances include the classic STAR TREK and director Curtis Harrington's 1974 telepic, THE CAT CREATURE, from a script by Robert Bloch. □

Rolling Thunder, Quentin Tarantino's boutique distribution label, bankrolled by Miramax, recently announced a slate of upcoming exploitation releases, which should be of interest to CFQ readers. Among the titles are three genre efforts: MIGHTY PEKING MAN, described as a Hong Kong remake of KING KONG; BLOOD AND BLACK LACE, the 1964 Mario Bava film that basically created the giallo genre later mastered by Dario Argento; and THE PSYCHIC, Lucio Fulci's 1978 supernatural stalker flick, starring Jennifer O'Neill.

The company was formed to distribute worthwhile films discovered by Tarantino at festivals. It got off to a weak start this year with the entertaining but overrated Hong Kong effort CHUNG KING EXPRESS (1994), then went on to confound critics with the inexplicable re-release of the '60s exploitation flick SWITCHBLADE SISTER. The original plan was for a 50/50 mix of new and old, but the ratio has now shifted to 3:1 in favor of older pics.

Both BLOOD AND BLACK LACE and THE PSYCHIC have seen previous stateside release, but Tarantino promises to give these films the care normally extended to art house imports. He even plans to release the Bava film in a subtitled print. This represents a first of sorts, as the late Italian auteur's work was always retailed for America, with dubbing, new titles, re-editing, and even alternate footage all but creating a completely different work. □

Production Starts

AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN PARIS

Anthony Waller, who gained attention last year with his low-budget thriller MUTE WITNESS, writes and directs this sequel to John Landis' 1981 horror comedy. No returning cast or crew are involved in this co-production between Hollywood Pictures and J&M Entertainment. Julie Delpy and Tom Everett Scott head the cast.

DEEP RISING

A couple weeks into production, Famke Janssen (so memorable in GOLDENEYE) replaced Claire Forlani in this science-fiction action thriller. Stephen Sommers directs, from his own script, about a gang of thieves who encounter a luxury liner abandoned on the high seas and discover that it is inhabited by a deadly creature. Treat Williams stars, with Kevin J. O'Connor and Wes Studi.

STEPHEN KING'S THE NIGHT FLIER

Miguel Ferrer (TWIN PEAKS) heads the cast for producer Richard Rubinstein. Director Mark Pavia co-wrote the screen adaptation of King's modern-day vampire tale with Jack O'Donnell. Incredibly, Hollywood Reporter's "Films in Production" chart lists this as a "drama."

MST-3K Back in Orbit

The rumors had been circulating for months. A premature announcement in TV Guide even predicted (inaccurately as it turned out) that the show would be back on by this fall. Finally, an official announcement has been made: After being set adrift by Comedy Central, MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 will relaunch the Satellite of Love on the Sci-Fi Channel. Thirteen new episodes will begin airing in February, with an option for as many as sixty more, depending on the ratings (which dropped during its seventh season on Comedy Central). The show will air three times a week; and, in keeping with the name of their new station, the new MST-3K will exclusively skewer science-fiction movies (no more DADDY-O!). Also, for the first time, MST-3K will be broadcast internationally, via Sci-Fi Europe and USA Network Latin America. The deal does not include re-runs of the old episodes, but fans can take solace in the cassette release of three titles through Rhino Video, including CAVE DWELLERS and THE AMAZING COLOSSAL MAN. Meanwhile the feature film (see page 56 for a review) is due on video in October. □



THE REAL ADVENTURES OF JONNY QUEST

Making its debut this fall on all three Turner TV networks, **THE REAL ADVENTURES OF JONNY QUEST** updates the old show while remaining true to the familiar formula. The new series, for which an initial run of 65 episodes has been ordered, boasts an impressive cast: George Segal (**THE TERMINAL MAN**) is Dr. Benton Quest; Robert Patrick (**TERMINATOR 2**) is Roger "Race" Bannon; J.D. Roth (**FIRST BORN**) is Jonny, now 14 years old; Michael Benyear (**FRIDAY THE 13TH: JASON TAKES MANHATTAN**) is Hadji, who has been promoted to being Dr. Quest's assistant; Jesse P. Douglas (**THE OUTSIDER**) plays Race's daughter, Jessie, a character not in the original series; and legendary voice-over actor Frank Welker provides the bark for Bandit. The list of guest voices reads like a who's-who for genre fans: Mark Hamill (**STAR WARS**), Roddy McDowall (**PLANET OF THE APES**) and Marc Singer (**BEASTMASTER**) are but a few of those lending their talents to villains and other characters.

J.D. Roth, 27, is excited about playing the title role. "I got so into reading the initial script and so into the idea of what they were trying to accomplish that I had to be Jonny,"

**Older and bolder,
the cartoon quester
returns on Turner TV.**

by F. Colin Kingston

he said. The new Jonny is much like the old one, Roth explains: "He doesn't think about how he's going to do it; he just wants to go do it. He is full of enthusiasm, and it is infectious. Jonny is crazy about his dad. He looks up to him and thinks he is the smartest man ever to walk the face of the earth. He has the typical teenage relationship with his father, but his father definitely sees something in him. Dr. Quest knows that Jonny is going to be something really special."

Michael Benyear describes the important changes in Hadji. "He doesn't say things like, 'Sim, Sim, Sala Bim' anymore. The writers and producers really researched the actual yogic powers. He can do more plausible stuff. There is an episode where Hadji pretends to stop his breathing so that the bad

Top of page: Although Jonny and Hadji are older, the cast of the new series will be familiar to fans of the old, with the exception of newcomer Jessie.

guys think he is dead."

During his first day on the show he found himself working with his childhood idol, Mark Hamill (**STAR WARS**). "I'm 25 years old," says Benyear. "During the ages between 7 and 12 my entire life consisted of **STAR WARS**. This blew my mind."

Benyear is proud to be associated with **JONNY QUEST**. "Hadji is one of the few roles for an ethnic actor that is not a

bad guy. I mean, how many East Indian heroes have been on television? Hadji is for the sensitive kids out there. He is the outsider in all of us."

Jesse P. Douglas, 35, plays Jessie Bannon. On the possibility of negative fan reaction to her character, Douglas says, "I'd be bummed if I upset anybody. Jessie is pretty cool. It is not like she is a girl who is whining all the time. If anything, she is a really good springboard for the rest of the storyline."

There are other reasons for Jessie being on the show as well. Says Roth, "Jonny hasn't discovered girls yet but when he does Jessie would be the type of girl he'd like to be with. In one episode she saves his life. He looks down at her and says, 'You're pretty cool.' I think something will happen between them but right now Jess is his best friend." □

CRASH

David Cronenberg turns S&M injury to S.F. metaphor.

By Alan Jones

David Cronenberg's *CRASH*, based on the 1973 J.G. Ballard cult novel that turns car accidents into sado-masochistic sexual turn-ons for an auto-erotic elite, is another terminally intellectual work from Canada's "Venereal Visconti," which will be embraced by his fans and reviled by censor boards worldwide. Colder in execution than even *THE NAKED LUNCH* and extreme in its depiction of fetishistic sexual obsession, Cronenberg's latest personal statement, one he says is set in "a very seductive, sensual and enveloping world," turns horrendous bodily injury into a science-fiction metaphor for how humanity must adapt to this runaway technological age.

James Spader and Deborah Unger play Mr. and Mrs. James Ballard, who find themselves increasingly attracted to the sexual excitement of pain and mutilation after a fatal accident brings them into a coven-like circle of "experimenters," led by guru Vaughn (Elias Koteas), who restages

famous fatal car crashes from the past—James Dean's and Jayne Mansfield's being just two—as kinky cabaret entertainment. Between depicting the flesh-to-metal contacts as "fertilizing rather destructive" (Ballard's own words) and pushing the sexual envelope to new cinematic boundaries, Cronenberg's cool, remote, and highly stylized approach offered his actors, including Holly Hunter and Rosanna Arquette, challenges unlike any of them had ever dared before.

Personifying *CRASH*'s prevailing sense of frigid composure and erotic daring is Deborah Unger as Catherine Ballard. She said, "When David Cronenberg sent me his script, I responded very much the same way the Cannes audience did at the premiere: I was shocked, taken aback, absolutely altered by it—and unprepared for that alteration. I wasn't familiar with the book, nor was I pre-disposed to the world it depicted. But undeniably the script impacted me and changed me."

Playing Unger's other half is *STAR-GATE* star James Spader. Together, they ex-

Ballard (Spader) and his wife Catherine (Deborah Unger) bask in the aftermath of an intentional auto wreck.



plore the psychological and philosophical terrain that Cronenberg shockingly gouges wide open from Ballard's bleakly deviant vision. Spader, like Unger, was turned-on creatively by the script. He said, "I was curious and intrigued. It was unlike anything I'd ever read before. I gave Cronenberg a call and said, 'This is just like your other films, yet it is unlike any other movie I've seen.' It was so original and provocative, I couldn't wait to do it."

Unger admitted, "I was nervous about embarking on such a journey. The sexual ennui I eventually claimed for Catherine was not something I easily picked out of my own personal closet. My fear stemmed mainly from the fact that I would become afraid to let myself go and really go for it."

What helped the actress deal with the explicit content was the frostily flat style Cronenberg extracted from his actors. "David was so specific and precise about what he wanted. The characters were clearly based on the metaphoric level. There was no room for verisimilitude. I couldn't research Catherine at all—it's not as if I could have gone into shopping mall Anywhere U.S.A., and seen Catherine strolling along. There also came a point where it was self-defeating to keep rereading the novel. I had to trust my own instincts and go with my own independent and organic feelings. None of us could intellectualize what we were doing, either: 'This is what I'm doing here, for that reason.' But everyone knew when a note was struck that David would enjoy conducting."

With Cronenberg's control-freak directorial style and the minimal dialogue spoken in hushed tones, Spader recalled not



Left: writer-director David Cronenberg. Above: James Ballard (James Spader) and Dr. Helen Remington (Holly Hunter) celebrate surviving an accident.

having as much artistic freedom as usual. "It became rapidly clear there were interpretations within scenes that felt right and wrong and the twain did not meet," he said. "If we were off-base with the tone, we knew it immediately. All the actors came to a silent agreement about that right feeling. The tone was set in 1973 by Ballard in the novel and reasserted by Cronenberg in his script. It was therefore interesting, in an inarticulate way, how the tone was re-set again by the actors performing those scenes. There was no dictation at all...we just gave in to that world and those ideas."

What Cronenberg did more than anything, according to Unger, was inspire her with his trust. "David doesn't use actors in the way other directors do," she remarked. "He ekes out of them a willingness to provide him with practically anything. He is such an intelligent, erudite, charismatic, subtle, and precise man, and it was delightful to discover those qualities, as I had no preconceived notions about him before we met. He saw Catherine in me long before I did! His approach to us, and the film in general, was unique. I keep discovering more thought-provoking things in it each time I see it. You can't just see CRASH once. It demands repeated viewings. For once past the stop-signs, all your personal conceptions, and misconceptions are removed, and the experience becomes less alienating."

Nevertheless, Unger had stop signs of her own, erected during the filming in Toronto. "There was no doubt about it: everyone knew we were entering uncharted territory. Did it feel ground-breaking? I felt it intuitively, I think. Initially I felt I was on a precipice, but then I had to aban-

don those thoughts, or I wouldn't have lent myself to any explorations whatsoever. And there were lots of opportunities for exploration. I had a great sense of freedom with Catherine because Cronenberg-Ballard's world dictated it. Her character couldn't kick back or spark out with wit or *bon mots*. Catherine's sexual boredom was not familiar to me, although I was aware of the sort of world it would exist in—one where the objectification of the individual is more important than their sense of humanity."

Spader met J.G. Ballard for the first time at the Cannes premiere, so any similarities between himself and the author were accidental. But he did read the novel after finishing the script. "Cronenberg's script was extremely faithful to the book," he said. "There weren't many surprises in comparing the two. Actually, the novel was a nice little textbook to have near because the narrative is so interior, and you could examine it more. Cronenberg's decision not to pull back from the novel was the correct approach. CRASH had to be put on the screen with all its extremity intact for it to work."

He continued, "Ballard's character is strangely one of an aggressively participatory observer. Although he's primarily an observer, he breaks all the rules of what that usually means by being completely participatory in what's going on—not in an overt way, yet very physically. It all lends a hallucinatory tone to the piece which allows you the illusion of reflection. CRASH doesn't have a lot of the usual emotional colors that this type of movie often has. The actors don't react with tremendous drama. However, it does have a relentless pace and structure that's odd—there's a feeling of a weirdly dichotomous pace to the sequences, one that I haven't seen on film before."

CRASH is most definitely science fiction in Spader's mind. "It's the science of

fiction and the fiction of science," he pointed out. "Both words are operative to larger and lesser degrees. One of the things I found most interesting in relationship to this was Ballard's own introduction to the French edition of *Crash*. In it he talks of his defining sense of science-fiction as man's reconciliation of conflict, the technology that surrounds them both, and what they create. Man can create any world he wants, but then he has to wrestle with it. Very often man creates a world that's in conflict with himself and his own natural order. Now that doesn't necessarily mean outer space in 50 years time. By deliberate design Ballard picked a technology that's been around for over 100 years: the automobile. That puts

continued on page 61

Betraying signs of her previous crashes, Gabrielle (Rosanna Arquette) fantasizes about the potential of a new car in a dealer showroom.



GAMERA 2: LEGION



Above: Gamera returns in **GAMERA 2: LEGION ATTACKS!** Below: the giant turtle faces his new foe, called "Rayglon" in Japan—i.e., the Japanese phonetic equivalent of "Legion," the name taken from a quote in the New Testament.



On a cold and windy Saturday in late January, about 30 men and a few women have gathered on an open field along the Tamagawa River, at one of the few remaining undeveloped spots in suburban Tokyo. Work begins at about 9 a.m., with the crew putting finishing touches on a roughly 25x25-foot wooden platform standing 12 feet above ground, upon which a few scant miniatures—an apartment building, an oil refinery tank—have been erected along the tarmac of a 1/25-scale airport. Gun powder charges are rigged at the front and rear of the platform and taped down to hide them from the camera lens.

Surveying these preparations is Shinji Higuchi, a young Japanese man with wild long hair, a goatee, and Lennonesque sunglasses, who never stops smoking cigarettes or chatting with assistants who constantly approach him to check on last-minute details of the upcoming shot. Finally, at about 2 p.m., a hush falls over the set, and

EGION ATTACKS!

As the giant turtle's comeback film makes its U.S. debut, a sequel is on the way.

everyone moves to a safe distance. On the platform, Higuchi barks out orders through a megaphone for the film to roll and the action to commence: Gamera, the giant saber-tusked turtle, begins to lumber across the tiny airport when, suddenly, he is rocked by two devastating explosions. The mighty monster (who's actually just under six feet tall in person), wounded in battle by his latest nemesis (filmed the previous day), collapses in apparent defeat.

"Katto! ("cut!") yells Higuchi, and three men with fire extinguishers quickly douse the flames engulfing the rubber monster suit. Then they peel off the turtle's thick shell, attached with velcro strips, and out pops the head of Akira Ohashi, a wiry 25-year-old stunt actor wearing a full-body green leotard, who says only, "It's damn hot in there!" Meanwhile, the camera crew crowds around a TV monitor for an instant replay from the video feed. They watch the shot, which lasts about three seconds; once Higuchi gives it his OK, the diligent crew begins preparing the day's second and last set-up, a continuation of the scene, in which an empty Gamera "stunt" costume will suffer massive burns.

Such is the hectic pace of the special-effects wizards at Daiei Studios, the Japanese film company that created Gamera in 1965 (to cash in on the monster craze started by rival Toho Studios' successful Godzilla series) and revived him in 1995's *GAMERA, GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE*. That film, which won universal critical

praise in Japan and is about to become the first Japanese kaiju eiga (that is, "monster movie") released theatrically in the U.S. since *GODZILLA 1985*, should go a long way toward improving the reputation of Japanese monster cinema, dismissed long ago by many as mere cheap camp. Though still low-budget by U.S. standards, *GAMERA* brought Japanese special-effects into the modern era by combining old tricks like rubber suits and miniature cities with new ones such as CGI enhancement and computer graphics. *GAMERA* owes its success to Higuchi—the gifted first-time special effects director who was just 29 when he made the film—plus its other principals: director Shusuke Kaneko, screenwriter Kazunori Ito, composer Koh Otani, and producer Tsutomu Tsuchikawa.

The same creative team reunited in late 1995 to begin production on the sequel, *GAMERA 2: LEGION ATTACKS*. Whereas *GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE* reintroduced Gamera as a long-dormant guardian of the continent of Atlantis, reawakened to defend Earth against the genetically-engineered monster Gyaos, the follow-up film will probe deeper into Gamera's nature as the Great Tusked Turtle defends Earth from yet another horrific creature, an alien spore that breeds swarms of insectoid monsters (thus the name "Legion"). The story is set on Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island, where a shower of comets is followed by a series of strange phenomena: a flock

of man-sized alien insects ("Soldier Legions") attack people in a subway; Gamera counter-attacks, but he is forced to retreat when an army of Soldier Legions cover his entire body. Led by the gigantic Queen Legion, the invading monsters head for Japan's major cities. Gamera is nearly killed in his effort to prevent the monsters from launching millions of deadly spores, but he is revived to face off with the Queen Legion in the climactic battle royal.

An outlandish story, to be sure. But judging from the previous film, live-action director Kaneko and effects director Higuchi have a knack for making the outlandish fun and exciting, much in the same way the genre's pioneers, director Ishiro Honda and sfx director Eiji Tsuburaya of Toho, did back in the 1950s and 60s. It's not surprising then that both men cite the Toho kaiju films as their inspiration rather than Daiei's original flying turtle movies.

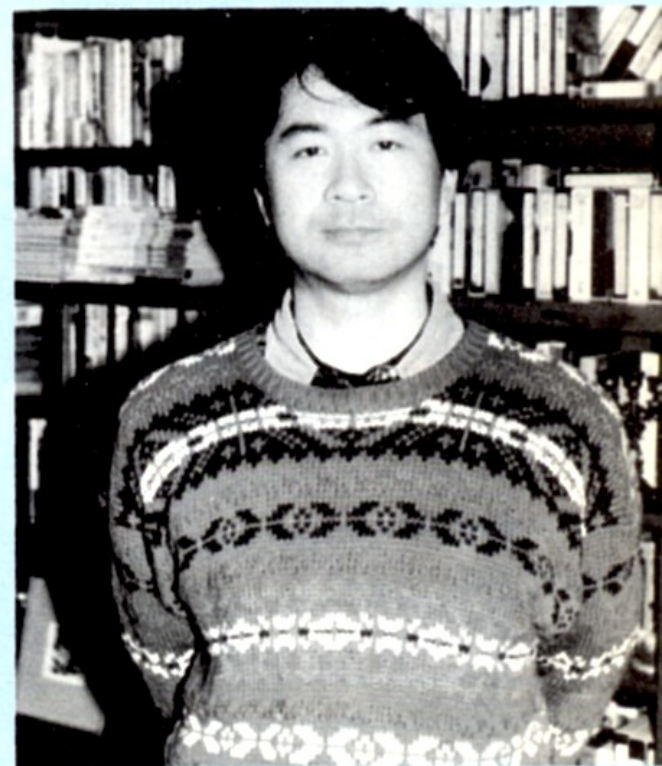
"Of the old Gamera series, I really enjoyed the original *GAMERA VS. GYAOS*, but there were other films, such as the one where Gamera does those flips on the iron bar (*GAMERA VS. GUIRON*)," said Kaneko. "Compared to Toho's special-effects films during that time, the effects were somewhat poor. Therefore, going into *GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE*, I really wanted to make a kaiju eiga that would be convincing to today's audiences, which are much more sophisticated."

Adds Higuchi, "A few years ago I was in Los Angeles, and I saw *MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000* on cable TV.

They were showing Gamera in a funny way, kind of making fun of him. We have to face the fact that Gamera is a huge turtle monster that stands up on two legs and flies: on the one hand, I kind of understand the audience's reaction, but I also want this to be accepted as a good, entertaining film. Realistically, this kind of thing just doesn't happen, big monsters appearing in the city and smashing buildings. But we are treating this material seriously, as an entertaining drama."

Despite their determination to move in a new direction, Kaneko and Higuchi say the ghost of the old Gamera movies has reared its ugly head at times. Before screenwriter Ito was hired to pen the 1995 film, Daiei commissioned two scripts by other writers that aped the early Gamera movies' child-oriented approach. Even though those ideas were ultimately tossed out in favor of Ito's more mature story, Kaneko says he

Director Shusuke Kaneko managed to revive the Gamera series despite the unpromising source material.



BY STEVE RYFLE



Stunt actor Akira Ohashi strikes a pose beside the new, improved Gamera suit, whose upper right shoulder betrays signs of the battle with Raygion.

still felt pressure to make the movie palatable for small-frys.

"The company probably really wanted to have something in between those two discarded scripts and Mr. Ito's script," he says. "I kept hearing that 'Gamera is the friend of children.' More than anything about those old monster movies, Mr. Ito, the writer, disliked those children in the films who act like adults and boss all the stupid grown-ups around. The kids know everything! But Daiei's people didn't feel the same way he did. I believe Daiei did a great amount of marketing research before making the new Gamera, and they found that people expect Gamera to be the friend of children, and to work together with children to defeat the enemy."

In the end, a child character emerged in the psychic girl Asagi (Steven Seagal's daughter Ayako Fujitani). But overall the tone of *GUARDIAN OF*

Special effects cameraman Hiroshi Kidokoro cut his teeth on Toho's new, post-1985 Godzilla series.



THE UNIVERSE was quite different from previous Gamera films—darker, more mature and actually *scary*—owing to the effective use of night scenes, the direct and quasi-graphic confrontations between man and the man-eating monster Gyaos, and a stirring musical score by Koh Otani, the best new composer in Japanese monster films in years. Even with Gamera playing the role of monster hero, the film's pacing and tone are more reminiscent of the classic monster films produced by Toho in the 1950s and 60s—the original *GODZILLA*, *RODAN*, *GODZILLA VS. THE THING*—rather than anything served up previously by Daiei. Though hardly graphic by U.S. horror film standards, the film did provide a few chills in scenes depicting Gyaos' hunger for human flesh, including one where the monster scarfs down train passengers. Kaneko and Higuchi, who promise the horrors will continue in *GAMERA 2*, both say they didn't set out to consciously recapture the flavor of the Honda-Tsuburaya vein. But they're not surprised at the comparison, since those films have become ingrained in their consciousness as filmmakers.

"When I saw all of Mr. Honda's movies as a child, I thought they were very extravagant compared to all the other monster films. Then when I grew up, I began to feel that Mr. Honda was a great spirit. The bottom line was, I wanted to make a 'right' kaiju eiga, and so Mr. Honda's films were like a textbook for me," said Kaneko.

GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE

"It may not be realistic to expect \$50 million, but hopefully the U.S. release will receive a lot of attention and remind audiences that there are talented filmmakers in Japan."

"Also, when I was a child, seeing all those monster movies really scared me. So, that's what I wanted to bring back again."

"There are not too many Japanese monster movies that show individual people as victims of the monsters," Higuchi pointed out. "In that theme, I really wanted to show the fear of facing a hideous monster. For example, if you walked into the jungle and faced a tiger, you would fear death—that's why we did those scenes with Gyaos attacking. It's like in *JURASSIC PARK*: of course they used a lot of big budget techniques, but they showed some face to face confrontations between the dinosaurs and people. I thought we should have that kind of scene, too."

Before the studio hired him as special effects director in 1993, Higuchi had worked as an artist on several films and animation projects, most notably as a creature designer for the Tsuburaya-inspired, U.S.-produced TV series *ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO* (see *Imagi Movies 2:4*), which was filmed three years ago but has never landed a U.S. distributor. Although armed with the same basic arsenal, plus a few

new tools, as every other Japanese effects director since Eiji Tsuburaya, Higuchi's work doesn't come across as that of an imitator or a neophyte. He has a bold style that is markedly different from his closest contemporary (and most obvious comparison), the man behind the last six *Godzilla* movies, Koichi Kawakita of Toho Studios.

For *GAMERA 2*, Higuchi again worked with animation artist Mahiro Maeda, who designed the monsters for the previous film. Last time out, Higuchi was forced to concede some of his ideas for making Gamera look more up-to-date and realistic. Now, having earned some clout with the studio, Higuchi was given more freedom to make the latest incarnation of Gamera better resemble his original idea. The monster now looks more like a sea turtle, with a smaller head, more pronounced scales and prominent spikes along his limbs; when it flies, fins now protrude from its two frontal arm holes to aid in steering.

Even more promising than the latest Gamera is *Legion*, a monster that appears in three different forms, the last of

Gamera's look in *LEGION ATTACKS* incorporates design ideas suggested but abandoned for *GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE*, including flipper-like forelimbs.





Special effects director Shinji Higuchi updated old techniques to create an improved Gamera.

GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE

REVIEW

Guaranteed to overcome your worst memories of the original series

which, the "Queen Legion," is a huge monster suit manipulated by two stunt actors inside. The suit is something of an experiment, because such large creatures are usually manipulated with overhead piano wires, with mixed results. Legion, which looks something like the Japanese monsters Giron and Megalon and the face hugger from ALIEN all rolled into one, has two actors sitting back-to-back inside, with the rear man using his legs to manipulate the monster's rear limbs.

"I had previous experience filming a huge monster with lots of wires," said effects cameraman Hiroshi Kidokoro, who had worked as an assistant sfx cameraman at Toho on GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE and other films. "This time, we said, 'OK, we cannot change the size of Legion—it has to be huge, because we wanted it to be bigger than Gamera, but we can get rid of all those wires.' That's why we decided to put two people in the suit. Also, with Biollante, we only used one monster costume for all the shots, so in the close-ups you can see the pinch where the wire is attached to the monster. In this film, we built all these small pieces for the different parts of Legion's body, so we don't have to worry about wires in the close ups."

While TriStar ponders the prospect of an American-made, all CGI Godzilla, Japanese effects artists have stuck to "suitmation" techniques. The reliance on rubber suits may be partly

GAMERA, GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE

A Daiei Studios production. Director: Shusuke Kaneko. Producer: Tsutomu Tsuchikawa. Special effects director: Shinji Higuchi. Screenplay: Kazunori Ito. Music: Ko Otani. Lighting: Hokoku Hayashi. Art director: Toshio Miike. Visual Effects Supervisor: Hajime Matsumoto. Digital Effects: Takashi Kawabata. Computer Graphics: Atsunori Sato.

Yoshinari Yonemori.....Tsuyoshi Ihara
Naoya Kusanagi.....Akira Onodera
Asagi Kusanagi.....Ayako Fujitani
Mayumi Nagamine.....Shinobu Nakayama
Police Detective Osako.....Yukijiro Hotaru

by Steve Biodrowski

Occasionally, a film comes along that confounds all expectations. Such a film is GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE, the Daiei Studios' surprisingly effective attempt to revive a franchise that no one thought worth reviving. The film seems to prove that there is a right way to handle any material, however ridiculous it may appear at first glance; the trick is to use some basic filmmaking elements—interesting narrative, involving direction, and effects spectacle—to overcome the audience's resistance to something that, if viewed objectively, is clearly unbelievable.

Ultimately, this is still a film about a giant, jet-propelled turtle, and it requires a big suspension of disbelief. However, the filmmakers have worked hard to earn that suspension, rather than take it for granted. Quite simply, the film takes a "What if" approach, in the sense of "What if this were really to happen?" The result is some clear exposition and clever concepts, which treat the creatures not as monsters but as animals with distinctive behavior patterns. Thus, Gyaos is not the solitary beast typical of the genre but a species (three are seen in the film) capable of reproducing and overwhelming Earth with its numbers. Also surprising and effective is



Asagi (Ayako Fujitani, Steven Seagal's daughter, who returns in the sequel) is a young girl whose psychic link prevents Gamera from being a loose cannon.

that the flying predators begin with a relatively modest wingspan of twenty feet, which makes them seem less incredible and saves the expected mano-a-mano confrontation with Gamera until the climax, when the lone surviving Gyaos has attained full size.

Gamera himself is given a new and more interesting back story that explains his incredible powers: he was genetically engineered by an ancient civilization specifically to combat Gyaos. Though still a man in a suit, the turtle is now presented with a clever use of effects that overcomes the modest budget. Not that the effects are much advanced over what we saw in GODZILLA 1985, for example, but they are employed with a clever slight of hand that reveals their strengths and conceals their weaknesses. Also, the sheer volume of colorful imagery ultimately overwhelms viewer resistance to whatever minor shortcomings there may be. And, the filmmakers have done a brilliant job of punctuating this overall high quality with

a continual series of of knock-out "money shots" that hit at just the right dramatic moments, supplying the necessary "oomph" to push this over from being merely diverting to being outright exhilarating.

Finally, in a way seldom attempted since the GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS (1956), this film never loses track of the human toll: rather than a movie about crumbling miniatures, this is a movie about characters in jeopardy. Especially effective is the use of Asagi (Fujitani), whose empathic link with Gamera not only guides the creature but also makes her experience, stigmata-like. This self-sacrifice on her part adds a layer lacking from most monster battles, serving as a clear illustration of the consequences to the human characters. By keeping the camera eye-level to the people, the film achieves the double result of making its monsters seem truly gargantuan and of keeping its audience involved with the drama on screen. □

GAMERA VS. THE SATELLITE OF LOVE

The low quality of the original series was perfectly pilloried by MST-3K.

Gamera was just a fading memory for Gen-X'ers weaned on Saturday afternoon creature features when, in 1991, a new cable TV show put the Titanic Turtle back on the map. That year, MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 subjected five Gamera features to the trademark running commentary of Joel Hodgson and his robot friends, Crow T. Robot and Tom Servo. The Gamera series, with its audacious storylines, squeaky child characters (a big pet peeve with Joel and the 'bots), outlandish monsters and borderline special effects, was the perfect fodder for The Satellite of Love's cruel cut-ups. MST-3K's Gamera episodes featured some wonderfully clever barbs and inspired musical interludes, and even though they are seldom aired today, they are among the show's best episodes.

MST used the English-dubbed films released by Sandy Frank Enterprises, which have different (i.e., inferior) voice tracks from the U.S. versions of the same films released by AIP-TV in the 1960s and '70s. Frank's dubbing is so inept that, on their own, the films are almost unwatchable; but on MST, such shortcomings only added to the parodic possibilities.

GAMERA THE INVINCIBLE a.k.a. **GAMERA** (1965): Gamera breaks free from arctic ice, wreaks havoc and is captured and sent to Mars in a rocket. Gags: Crow groans that Gamera looks like "Godzilla with a backpack on." Kenny, the insufferable pudgy kid, so annoys the 'bots that they make a voodoo doll of him. Later, Gamera (Mike Nelson, in a green sweater) explains he is only using the adoring Kenny to improve his own public image! Watch as the



Though he often fought other monsters, Gamera's biggest beating came from the crew of *The Satellite Of Love*; MST-3K screened five Gamera films in 1991.

U.S. general seems to read his lines off note cards and Joel yells, "Cut! Let's take that again!"

WAR OF THE MONSTERS, a.k.a. **GAMERA VS. BARUGON** (1966): Gamera returns to Earth and fights a giant reptile that spits freon from an elongated tongue. Gags: The highlight is Tom Servo's commercial for the "5,000-piece, Fighting Men and Monsters Play Set," a fictional toy based on the endless ravaging of Tokyo by Japanese monsters. During the air force's attack on Barugon, Joel feigns dismay at seeing the piano wires moving the planes.

RETURN OF THE GIANT MONSTERS, a.k.a. **GAMERA VS. GYAOS** (1967): A supersonic bird-bat emerges from a volcano and stalks Japan; Gamera defeats the evil beast and gives a fat kid a ride on his back. The best of the series. Gags: This one is full of joyous farce. In various segments, Joel makes a Gyaos mask and later appears in a Gyaos costume! Later, Joel and his sidekicks

briefly perform a kaiju-inspired opera.

ATTACK OF THE MONSTERS, a.k.a. **GAMERA VS. GUIRON** (1969): Two kids are kidnapped by space women who want to eat their brains! Gamera defeats a knife-nosed giant reptile. Gags: Gamera's famous theme song sparks several great musical parodies, including Joel's own version ("Gamera is really neat! Gamera is full of meat!") and a skit where Michael Feinstein (Mike Nelson) likens Gamera's song to Cole Porter and Rogers and Hart.

GAMERA VS. ZIGRA (1971): An alien shark-bird stages a bid for world domination at an aquatic amusement park. Gags: The satellite's last visit with Gamera includes a skit where in the robots construct shoebox-and-tissue monster dioramas, and another musical tour de force in which the Gamera theme is played in rap, reggae, jazz, and other styles (Check out the death metal version by Dr. Forrester and TV's Frank).

There were three more Gamera films that unfortunately were not subjected to the joyous dissection of MST. They are **DESTROY ALL PLANETS** (1968, fourth in the series), in which two kids are kidnapped by an alien squid that flies around in a space ship made of ping-pong balls; **GAMERA VS. MONSTER X** (1970, sixth in the series), wherein a female monster lays eggs inside Gamera and two boys enter the big turtle's bloodstream in a bathyscaphe to kill the parasite; and **GAMERA SUPER MONSTER** (1980, eighth and last in the series), which features an annoying, turtle-loving boy, warring factions of female aliens, and stock footage of the battles from all the previous entries. **Steve Ryfle**

due to budget constraints, but it has also become an important part of the genre's tradition. Toho effects director Kawakita has remarked that doing Godzilla another way would rob the monster of his "Japaneseness."

The monster suits, puppets, and models for the two Gamera films were built under the supervision of Tomoo Haraguchi, an artist whose respect for the conventions of suitmation runs even deeper than tradition. "My grandfather, Hisashi Shimonaga, worked for Toho Studios as a sound recordist at the time that Mr. Tsuburaya was there. I saw all the factories where they made the costumes for **WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS** and the original Mecha-Godzilla and so on. I learned how to make monster suits by observing the way they were made back in the 1960s."

Perhaps the most dazzling aspect of the effects in the new Gamera series is the combination of old and new. When Gamera took flight in the original films, flames shot out of his shell's portholes while he spun around on a wire. For **GUARDIAN**, Higuchi devised a jaw-dropping effect by combining old-school models and pyrotechnics with computer enhancement for fresh, fast, furious flight sequences. Throughout the film, Higuchi used newer techniques and technology like this to challenge the perceived limitations of Japanese special effects.

"The technology didn't come first," Higuchi says. "The bottom line was, I wanted to make the best picture I could. I had all these images in my mind, and to make them possible, I searched for what new technology and effects could be used. It's not that I wanted to use computer graphics; it's just that this technology can make these images a reality. Even with the old techniques, I felt that they weren't being used effectively anymore, so I brought them back again."

For **GAMERA 2**: Kaneko, Higuchi, and screenwriter Kazunori Ito have given much thought to the seldom-pondered question: "What is Gamera?" and come up with an answer that may provide an interesting foundation for at least

one further installment in the series. More than just a friendly monster, Gamera is emerging as a force of nature—not really a protector of man but of the Earth itself.

“Since the previous film, Gamera has matured,” said Kaneko. “Before, it was obvious that Gamera was fighting for Mankind. Now, when the monster fights, the question arises as to why. I wanted to show what he is fighting for. Gyaos was an evil monster, but this time I had to show something different—not evil, not really a hateful monster. This Legion character creates this great fear because it invades Earth, threatening everyone’s faith in the planet and creating a global crisis. Legion is different from anything on Earth, and it has its own social community which includes the Soldier Legion and the Queen Legion. Another difference is that Legion isn’t inherently evil; the only thing it’s trying to do is breed and survive.”

Screenwriter Ito adds: “In *GAMERA 2*, Gamera defeats Legion, again saving mankind in the process. When Gamera fought Gyaos, his motivation was already programmed and instinctual. What is Gamera’s motivation in fighting against Legion? I believe Gamera is taking on the role of Earth’s protector, its immunity against any type of invasion.”

Rumor has it that Ito has already come up with a storyline for a third Gamera film, the conclusion to a trilogy in which the colossal reptile defends Earth from her greatest threat yet: Humankind! “I do have several ideas, but I am not



In his first encounter with his new enemy, Gamera is defeated when his body is covered by a swarm of Legion soldiers.

ready to reveal them,” Ito said. “I personally want this third story to reveal more clearly what ‘Guardian of the Universe’ means.”

LEGION ATTACKS was released in Tokyo on July 13 in an effort to capitalize on the summer movie-going season. Last year, *GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE*, though critically acclaimed, was a commercial disappointment when released in March, drawing just over 2 million viewers. By comparison, Toho’s *GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER* was released during the Christmas season, a popular movie-going time in Japan, and sold about 4 million tickets. Despite the uneven quality of the recent Toho films, which have great effects but poor scripting, Godzilla re-

mains the undisputed King of the Monsters, with Gamera a distant second in popularity. Still, the new Gamera films are mounting a serious challenge, at least artistically.

“The last time, our main goal was to fight Godzilla and win. We actually defeated Godzilla in spirit, but Godzilla won commercially,” Higuchi said. “This time, our goal is to defeat the previous *GAMERA* and make an even better film. I think there are various reasons why Gamera was not as commercially successful as Godzilla. For one thing, all the staff wanted to make a great, entertaining film that could be enjoyed by adults. But in Japan, kaiju eiga means ‘just for kids.’ People who have never seen these films just do not accept that they can be good, entertaining action films. Japanese audiences have a prejudice against them.”

The Daiei brass is now anticipating the U.S. release of *GAMERA, GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE*. Houston-based A.D. Vision, distributor of Japanese animation features on video and laser disc, bought the North American rights to the film last year in hopes of expanding into the live-action market. The company’s contract with Daiei also stipulated that the film get a limited theatrical release prior to video. By early summer, A.D. Vision had not yet contracted with a distributor

to put the film in theaters, but a series of screenings in major cities was planned.

Already, *GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE* has screened at a Dallas theater, at film festivals in Seattle and Montreal and at Landmark’s Nuart Theatre in Los Angeles in July. Daiei is well aware of Gamera’s low standing among serious sci-fi fans here—a fact it struggled with when negotiating with distributors for a theatrical run—but the studio is hoping the film will surprise a few viewers, who in turn will spread the word.

“It may not be realistic to expect a box office return of \$50 million for *GAMERA*’s North American release, but my hope is that the film will receive a lot of attention in the way *AKIRA* did,” said Haruyo Moriyoshi, Daiei’s chief of international sales. “And hopefully, after all these years, it will remind American audiences that there are still many talented creators in the Japanese film industry.”

“I want as many people as possible to see the film,” said director Kaneko. “In American monster films, there are only a few scenes with the actual monsters. Japanese monster films may look a little bit cheaper, but still there are many more monster scenes. So I’m hopeful that American audiences will enjoy watching this kind of film.” □

After fighting Legion, Gamera is rocked by an explosion at the Sendai airport.



X-FILES

The Fox TV show expands beyond cult status to earn mainstream acceptance.

This is the year that one could not venture past the newsstand without seeing an X-FILES cover story on at least one and usually several magazines: *People*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *TV Guide*, *Details*, and *Rolling Stone*, with its infamous cover photo depicting leads David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson, devoid of their FBI suits—or any other clothing for that matter—cuddling under the sheets. Astronomer Carl Sagan took the show to task for promoting anti-scientific thinking in *Parade* magazine and in his book *The Demon-Haunted World*. If you bothered to turn on the infotainment shows, you'd often catch stars Anderson and Duchovny or series creator Chris Carter. Reviewers of movies and TV shows dealing with paranoia, conspiracies, aliens, and the paranormal couldn't get by without a comparison to THE X-FILES. Also, the show, which regularly references films, books and other TV shows, itself became the hip reference in other fictional media. Characters in *HOMICIDE*, *THE DREW CAREY SHOW*, and *ROSEANNE*, for example, mentioned X-FILES, and *CHICAGO HOPE* played a few bars of its theme music. Even the summer's monster hit, *INDEPENDENCE DAY*, had a dialogue reference.

Whether the publicity barrage or the show's continuing high quality brought about this year's ten percent audience increase is debatable. But Fox finally took advantage of its most popular drama by kicking its merchandising department into high gear: clothing, comic books, key chains, videotapes and laser discs of first season episodes, junior novelizations, best selling original novels, and an *Official Guide to the X-Files*. *SONGS IN THE KEY OF X*, an album by some of Chris Carter's favorite musicians, many of whom are X-FILES fans, hit the charts, and in Europe, where the show is also a big hit, remixed

versions of the show's theme were instant bestsellers.

X-FILES conventions are also drawing hordes, who hang on every word uttered by supporting actors from the show as well as a few writers, producers, and creator Chris Carter, whose previous con experience had been limited to a few gatherings of UFO buffs for research. "The situation is surreal to me—that I would be up on stage answering questions," said Carter. "Usually, on a TV show, you have very little personal communication with your audience. Now I'm up there on stage as some sort of performer. I always feel like I should be able to at least breakdance or something, and that I'm disappointing the fans in some way. I have no production value in myself; all I am is a spokesperson for the show. What surprised me the most is everyone always warned me that all the weirdos were going to come out of the woodwork. What's really

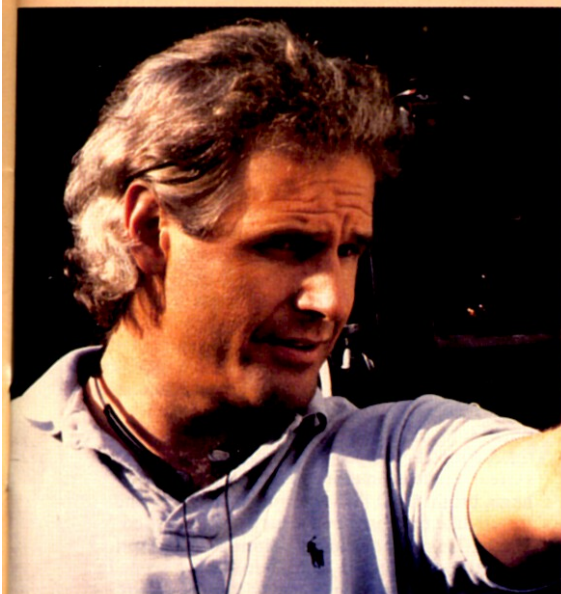
been wonderful is that the fans are just like regular folks, like me, I guess, who are coming out and enjoying the show. The grand majority are very nice, polite, respectful, and complimentary, and it's a good time. I really want these to be seen not so much as conventions but as parties. I would like it if everyone could just get together and have a great time."

THE X-FILES has also achieved acclaim from its peers, winning the 1995 Golden Globe for Best Television Drama (although surprisingly it wasn't even nominated in 1996) and receiving seven 1995 Emmy nominations. Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny were nominated for acting awards by this year's Golden Globes and the Screen Actors Guild, and a seemingly shocked Anderson won the SAG award for Best Actress in a Television Drama.

Although THE X-FILES did not take home an Emmy, it was the first Fox Net-

An alien abduction in "José Chung's 'From Outer Space,'" one of the third season highlights.






work show to be nominated for Best Drama. Carter said he realized early in the ceremony that "we didn't have a chance in hell of winning. I saw the things they were picking, and it seemed to me that they were more mainstream." Carter regretted that Duchovny and Anderson had not received acting nominations, nor did the show receive nominations for directing or production design. "That we didn't get one is, I think, highly unfair," he said. "I'm hoping that isn't political, because we deserve it in the biggest way. That [director of photography] John Bartley did get a nomination [for 'One Breath'] was really sweet."

THE X-FILES may not have taken home a gold statuette, but its influence on TV programming is undeniable, with a number of darker-hued genre shows popping up last year: CBS' AMERICAN GOTHIC, UPN's NOWHERE MAN and FOX's own STRANGE LUCK and PROFIT. Most of these were cancelled by the end of the season (not necessarily due to poor quality—PROFIT in particular was an unexpected gem), but that didn't keep the networks from trying again. This coming season, NBC will offer DARK SKIES, about a male-female duo chasing aliens, and Carter himself has a new show on Fox, MILLENNIUM, which he described as "more of a traditional show, but with aspects of the paranormal." MILLENNIUM stars Lance Henriksen (ALIENS) as an ex-FBI agent with the power to enter criminal minds, who is recruited into an underground crime-fighting organization at the turn of the century. Carter attributes the various clones to THE X-FILES' opening up the suspense/horror genres as

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**BY PAULA
VITARIS**



Series star David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson continue to gain in popularity. Inset: X-FILES creator Chris Carter will guide the show to a fourth season while also producing a new show, MILLENNIUM.

EPISODE GUIDE

"The best way to predict the future is to invent it."
—Well-Manicured Man

THE BLESSING WAY

★★★

9/22/95. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by R.W. Goodwin.

"The Blessing Way" begins where last season's finale, "Anasazi," left off. Fearing Mulder is dead after the Cigarette Smoking Man orders the destruction of the boxcar buried in the New Mexico desert. Scully returns to Washington, D.C., where she is put on suspension pending an investigation. Compounding her distress is the discovery of a computer chip inserted underneath the skin of her neck by her abductors last season.

Back in New Mexico, Mulder is found, near death, by Alfred Hosteen and other members of the Navajo community. The Navajos heal him with a traditional Blessing Way ceremony, during which he experiences a vision in which he sees and talks with his father and Deep Throat. Meanwhile, the Cigarette Smoking Man searches frantically for the missing DAT tape containing the Department of Defense UFO files while staving off the inquiries of his New York-based colleagues, especially the suspicious Well-Manicured Man (John Neville). This devious character has a separate agenda, and secretly contacts Scully at Bill Mulder's funeral to warn her that her own life is in danger. A healed Mulder travels to Greenwich, Connecticut, to quiz his mother about his father's work. The climax comes on furiously when a fearful Scully pulls a gun on Skinner, while back at her apartment, her sister Melissa falls victim to the bullet meant for Scully.



"The Blessing Way" featured the debut of the Well-Manicured Man (John Neville), leader of an information consortium behind the conspiracy.

to say the least. But her actions toward the end are confusing. If she suspects a killer is on the way to her apartment, why leave and go off with Skinner, when she knows Melissa is about to arrive? And why go to Mulder's apartment, which may be bugged or under observation? These questions fade in the excitement of watching Scully and Skinner pull their guns on each other, but they remain holes in the story.

"You'd be surprised what's not on the map in this country and what our government will do to keep it that way."
—Mulder

—Mulder

PAPER CLIP

★★★★

9/29/95. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Rob Bowman.

A reunited Mulder and Scully probe the mystery behind the New Mexico boxcar and the DAT tape with the help of the Lone Gunmen. Their investigation leads them to Victor Klemper (Walter Modell), a retired German scientist brought to the United States under "Operation Paperclip," the post-World War II project that bypassed required immigration procedures in order to import Nazi scientists and their valuable knowledge to the United States. Klemper sends them to a mine in West Virginia, where, in an extraordinary sequence, they discover a hidden archive: millions of medical records, including one for Scully, and one for Mulder's sister Samantha—but underneath the label on Samantha's folder is an older one for Mulder himself. Skinner, who still has the DAT tape, brokers a deal with the Cigarette Smoking Man; he'll give him the tape, if he promises not to harm Mulder and Scully. But when Krycek beats up Skinner, steals the tape and then goes on the lam after the Cigarette Smoking Man tries to have him assassinated, the Cigarette Smoking Man tells Skinner the deal's off. Skinner plays his trump card and informs him that the contents of the tape have been memorized by members of the Navajo nation. Mulder makes one more upsetting discovery: his mother confesses that his father "chose" Samantha to be abducted.

This barely covers the complicated storyline of "Paper Clip," an episode rich in both plot and theme. "Paper Clip," as stated in the teaser's legend of the White Buffalo Calf, is about choices, trade-offs, and sacrifices. It is also about the people who suffer when others make choices for them without their consent. But Mulder doesn't buy into that game; when Skinner offers them the opportunity to come in from the cold, to let Scully see her sister again, Mulder defers to Scully and willingly abides by her decision.

"Paper Clip," as well as "Anasazi" and "The Blessing Way," is also about the meeting of Western and non-Western cultures, and particularly how they record and remember their history. The Nazis who were brought to the U.S. in the real Operation Paperclip detailed their

horrors meticulously on paper and the medical files in the mine fulfill the same function, and also serve as a contrast to the Navajos' oral tradition of passing down their history. It is that tradition that saves the day for Mulder and Scully, but "Paper Clip" makes no statement against technology. If the answers, as Mulder suggests in the ineffably sad exchange with Scully in the hospital, are truly in the X-Files, perhaps it's because that is where the documented and the undocumented worlds come together.

"Paper Clip" is spectacular to look at, particularly the stunning scene in the deserted mine. An enormous, ruined building constructed as a series of terraces, it possesses the same mythological and psychological resonance as the submarine tower in "End Game." Inside, it looks like an Escher drawing come to life; its staircases seem suspended, as if by magic, in the air. By the time Mulder and Scully enter the endless corridors lined with file cabinets, we are in the realm of the surreal, made even more so by the impossibly huge, bright UFO that rises out of nowhere and the elf-like creatures that scurry past a startled Scully. This scene is overwhelming in concept, execution, and impact, yet the following scene in the diner is a perfect balance, with its intimacy and realism, as Skinner, Scully and Mulder talk around a table.

Mitch Pileggi's performance in this two-parter is outstanding, especially in his wrangles with William B. Davis' Cigarette Smoking Man.

"No man, not the cows again!"

—Zero

D.P.O.

★★1/2

10/6/95. Written by Howard Gordon. Directed by Kim Manners.

An unusually high number of deaths by lightning brings Mulder and Scully to Connerville, Oklahoma, a rural town located near a scientific institute that studies lightning phenomena. They locate a possible witness to the latest death, a strangely inobservant teenager named Darren Peter Oswald (Giovanni Ribisi), who claims he saw nothing unusual at the scene. When Mulder and Scully uncover the information that the emotionally and intellectually stunted Darren is the only surviving victim of the lightning strikes, Mulder begins to suspect a force other than Mother Nature is involved.

"D.P.O." is an underrated episode, coming after the rush of events in "Anasazi," "The Blessing Way," and "Paper Clip." The revelations of those three episodes are barely touched upon in "D.P.O.," and Mulder and Scully appear to be inhumanly unaffected. Some kind of transitional episode was called for, before the story moved on.

On its own, however, "D.P.O." is a slight but touching tale about a damaged, neglected teen who vents his frustration and rage by calling down

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Lightning strikes are guided by an unstable teenager in "D.P.O.," the first stand-alone episode of the season, a let-down after "Paperclip."



A nearly dead Mulder undergoes a traditional Navajo ceremony, "The Blessing Way," and sees a vision of the dead Deep Throat character.

As a story element, Mulder's vision during the Blessing Way chant makes sense: it's a chance for reconciliation with a dead father and the acceptance of his death. In execution, it's overloaded with too much detail: Mulder spinning through space in his bed of leaves, the ghostly observers, and not one but two father figures, Bill Mulder and Deep Throat. They speak in dialogue so turgid it loses meaning, especially compared to the deceased Bill Scully's spare but deeply moving monologue to his daughter in "One Breath." It's a scene to be accepted intellectually but not emotionally.

In all other aspects, "The Blessing Way" is a solid middle chapter of a three-parter. The introduction of an international consortium to which the Cigarette Smoking Man must answer diminishes his mystery somewhat but also creates new possibilities for his character.

Except for Mulder's vision, it's really Gillian Anderson's episode all the way: Scully's anger, her grief, her tentative stab at exploring her emotions and memories with a hypnotherapist. The scene where she discovers the chip in her neck is spooky,

X-FILES

THE BLESSING WAY & PAPER CLIP

The third season's opening two-parter continues the conspiracy story of last season's finale, "Anasazi."

By Paula Vitaris

From its first episode, when Fox Mulder told his new partner Dana Scully that his sister had been abducted by aliens, and that he had had no memory of the event until he underwent hypnotic regression therapy, to this season's finale, when Mrs. Mulder told the Cigarette Smoking Man she had "repressed" all memories of their former friendship, *THE X-FILES* has been a study on the theme of memory. Although the exploration of this began on an individual level, it has come to take on a larger resonance, encompassing memory as a societal and cultural phenomenon.

Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the third season's opening two-parter, "The Blessing Way" and "Paper Clip," which begins with Navajo elder Albert Hosteen relating how his people have come to trust memory over history. Chris Carter, who wrote both episodes, contrasts the oral tradition of the Navajos against the written files, both hard copy and computerized, of the government's collaboration with Nazi scientists brought to the U.S. after World War II as part of "Project Paperclip" (so named because the file folders of the scientists chosen for inclusion were marked by a paper clip).

"I read an article on the Holocaust," said Chris Carter, "that contained an argument about memory versus history. Its premise was that with history we reshape the truth, and with the death of memory we lose the truth. These were some of the points I made in the episodes. With the Navajo, we have a people with a very strong oral tradition who, in the show, have become the repository of truths of the most high-tech kind. I had seen *SCHINDLER'S LIST*, which came at the perfect time because the last survivors of the Holocaust were dying, and with them possibly the bulwark of memory that would prevent it from ever happening again. Those things were all in my mind when I came up with these story ideas. I don't want to be pretentious, but I was certainly taken with the idea that the death of memory could in



Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) has a talk with Mulder and Scully near the end of "Paperclip," the concluding chapter of a three-part conspiracy story begun with last season's "Anasazi."

fact be the birth of new evils."

Navajo culture first appeared on *X-FILES*' second season finale, "Anasazi," but in the concluding two-parter, Carter delved further into their way of life, concerned after he received a letter from members of the Navajo nation detailing some errors in the episode. With Mulder undergoing a traditional healing ceremony in "The Blessing Way," Carter wanted to ensure his script was as accurate as possible. "I went to a Navajo Native American church ritual. That means I took peyote, which is a legal substance for the Navajo, and I sat there for eight or nine hours on the ground with a group of Navajos going through a chant. I was just getting a feel for what they do. In 'The Blessing Way,' we were very careful not to use a real chant, because the Navajos feel the chants are sacred and should not be copied. So the chant I chose is something of an all-purpose chant. With Mulder in such a serious situation, he probably would have received a different kind of chant, but out of respect for the Navajo I took a bit of liberty there."

During the ceremony, Mulder, barely alive after the explosion in the boxcar at the end of "Anasazi," experiences an out-of-body encounter with two deceased men: Deep Throat and his father, Bill Mulder. The writing of this scene was a deeply personal one for Carter, whose parents had both passed away. "Even though I don't believe

in these things, I wanted to see them both again," he mused. "I had written 'Anasazi,' where Mulder's father dies, which aired May 19, and my father died on May 21. It was very emotional for me, even though he'd been sick for a long time. I still wanted to tell Mulder's story, but I thought, 'What would be the thing that I would most want to see?' I would want to speak to my father and have him tell me to carry on." Carter included Deep Throat in the vision because he was a "father figure of sorts and a person Mulder would have looked to for guidance."

Carter drew the vision's starry night setting and Bill Mulder's and Deep Throat's ghostly attendants from Navajo myth, in which the hero is assisted by the Star People, who represent man's spiritual nature. "That was quite accurate, although the Navajo take peyote and Mulder didn't," Carter explained. "The feedback I got from the Navajo was positive." The vision, Carter said, is a transforming event for Mulder. "He's been reborn, in a way. He's been refueled and revitalized, and now more than ever he has very personal and real reasons to continue. Although the whereabouts of his sister is still a big question mark, he knows a little bit more about her now."

Another theme Carter wanted to explore was that of sacrifice, which he did by incorporating the Lakota legend of the White Buffalo into the "Paper Clip" teaser: a white buffalo calf is born, but its mother dies. This mirrors the death of both Bill Mulder in "Anasazi" and Melissa, Scully's sister, who is killed by a bullet meant for Scully. Carter admitted that part of the motivation for killing Melissa was a practical one. The actress who played her, Melinda McGraw, had just won a role on an ultimately short-lived sitcom, *THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS*, which would limit her availability. But Melissa's death also served a storytelling purpose. "The truth is when you do big episodes, three-parters like this, dramatic things have to happen," Carter said. "I've always said I don't want the audience to think that anyone is safe on *THE X-FILES*."



In a visual highlight of "Paper Clip," Mulder is awestruck by the appearance of a UFO.

“I read an article about the Holocaust that said with history we reshape the truth, and with the death of memory we lose the truth.”

—Producer Chris Carter—

The White Buffalo story was a beautiful legend that somehow reflected on the show. I thought it would be wonderful, in the middle of this two-parter, to go to a barn where a white buffalo is being born. It grounded the show once again in Indian lore. It represented a rebirth: if something has to die, then something else can be reborn. That's a very beautiful idea, and I think that's what happened here, with Mulder's father dying to refuel Mulder's quest, and Scully's sister dying to refuel her quest. I think these things actually helped to make the characters more keen in their motivations."

In "The Blessing Way" and "Paper Clip," Carter felt the time had come to expand the conspiracy element of THE X-FILES to a higher level. He had taken the first step in "Anasazi," when United Nations representatives became involved after a hacker called the Thinker broke into the Department of Defense UFO computer files and downloaded the information onto a DAT tape. In "The Blessing Way," the audience met for the first time the New York consortium, an international group of conspirators, and its nominal leader, the "Well-Manicured Man," played to crafty perfection by John Neville.

Why extend the conspiracy? Carter said. "You have these groups that are believed to be out there, the Trilateral Commission, the Illuminati. I believe that, if this is going on, there would have to be a lot of high-level, smart and well-connected folks who are pulling the strings." Carter also wanted to thrust the Cigarette Smoking Man into a new situation, one that would threaten his status, and the best way to do that was to get him in trouble with the Consortium due to the loss of the DAT tape. "He'd always won," Carter said. "I think Skinner bounced him from his office once, but beyond that he was always the man in control. It was interesting to see him in a situation where he started to unravel, but as you saw in 'Nisei,' he's not quite a wimp."

One of THE X-FILES' spectacular scenes ever took place in "Paper Clip," at a deserted West Virginia mine serving as a repository for what seems like miles of file cabinets holding medical records that go back for decades. In reality, the location was the British Columbia Museum of Mining at Britannia Beach, a former mine situ-

ated about 45 minutes outside Vancouver. "It's an amazing location," Carter said. "This building goes a quarter mile up the side of a mountain. It's like one giant cathedral room. If I see a location that interests me, I'll figure out a way to put it in the show. When I saw that mine climbing up the side of that hill, I asked myself what was the best way I could use this thing? It's not like I wrote this story and went looking for a mine. I found this mine and went looking for a way to fit it into the story."

The hundreds—thousands?—of cabinets, with their detailed medical records, seem to represent a new level of obsessively meticulous recordkeeping; it's the ultimate image of bureaucratic organization. "I'm interested in the idea of file-keeping on people," Carter said, adding that he had also been inspired by the knowledge that small pox vaccinations (which are part of the mine files) have been recorded since the 1950s. "We willingly give ourselves over to these things, like the taking of our tissue or the taking of a vaccine. And now the military is taking DNA from every soldier [to facilitate identification of remains]. There were two Marines who objected and would not give their DNA. I believe that's appropriate. What might the government be doing with their tissue?" The structure of bureaucracy also fascinates Carter. "What intrigues me is that a bureaucracy can become so labyrinthine that it starts not to work. It's meant to facilitate society, but it actually imprisons it. It also seeks to control in ways I find disturbing. Additionally, I'm interested in the abuse and the corruption that such power provides."

As if the scenes in the endless corridors were not enough, Carter followed those with a stunning sequence in which Mulder stands motionless on a catwalk, bathed in blinding light cast by a UFO rising on the other side of the building's dirty windows. Said Carter, "I thought, 'What would be the coolest way to use this location? To have a space ship take off from the bottom and see it go up through the series of rooms.'" Unable to be on location the day this scene was shot, Carter carefully went over the plans with director Rob Bowman. "It was a little less complicated than you might imagine. It was just a crane pulling up a lighting truss holding this big aluminum structure that had

a bunch of lights on it. Luckily, we have someone as capable as Rob Bowman taking advantage of that setting, and [director of photography] John Bartley did a fantastic job putting it on film."

A pivotal character in the two-parter is Assistant Director Skinner, who once again comes to the assistance of Mulder and Scully. In "The Blessing Way" he is forced to put Scully on suspension. "Skinner walks the line between being a good FBI man and being a believer and ally of Mulder and Scully, and in disobeying him [in 'Anasazi'], Scully had taken advantage of that," Carter said. When Skinner talks to Scully after her suspension, and she angrily confronts him, Skinner was attempting "to remove himself from her punishment, but she wouldn't let him. When he followed her, she made it a personal issue that he wasn't able to come to her aid. I felt that if I made this believable, Skinner would react to her as he did."

In "Paper Clip," Skinner takes his support for Mulder and Scully even farther when he wrangles a deal with the Cigarette Smoking Man to exchange the DAT tape, now in his possession, for their safety. He meets Mulder and Scully at a diner and presents a choice to them: come in from the cold, let him give the Cigarette Smoking Man the tape, and their safety (for now) will be assured. Mulder is reluctant, but then Scully says she must see her sister. "This quest for the truth was also a very personal thing for Scully," said Carter. "Her sister was in a hospital bed, and she might die. Scully realized that the further out they got, the less chance they actually had of finding the truth. They had become so willfully disenfranchised that they were going to lose any kind of hope they had to work as insiders." Mulder's deferring to Scully's was, for Carter, a scene that proved as much as any other, how close the two agents were.

Although Mulder and Scully uncovered a great number of secrets in "The Blessing Way" and "Paper Clip," the most shocking is not revealed until the penultimate scene, when Mulder travels to his mother's home in Greenwich, Connecticut. One of the files in the mine was labeled with the name of his missing sister, Samantha, but underneath Samantha's label was another label bearing

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"a viable one again for exploitation. All we showed people was that there was an audience for this kind of programming. It's as simple as: If you do a good show, people are going to watch it, no matter what genre it is. Even if you choose this genre, you better do a good job, or people are not going to watch."

Amidst all this attention, the show continues to offer some of the most compelling, imaginative, and beautifully shot hours on television. Mulder and Scully remain the heroes of a quest saga, wrapped in the skin of the quintessential 20th century icon: the detective. And though perspectives shift with each new revelation in the "mythology," the show remains rock solid in the relationship between Mulder and Scully, despite some rough patches in the writing this season. The homages to films and books (with "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space'" a virtual festival of cross-referencing) continually pop up, and every now and then THE X-FILES tips a hat to its fans—as in "Ni-sei" when Mulder, pursuing a suspect, pulled a second pistol from an ankle holster and proclaimed, "I got tired of losing my gun"—according to Carter, a "wink to the Internet fans who have given me no end of grief" about Mulder always losing his gun.

Although Carter is a frequent lurker on the various X-FILES computer bulletin boards, he said he can't think of an instance where fan comment made a specific impact on the show, although it may influence him generally. "In fact, it does affect me. If I read objections, if there are a lot of voices, as in 'Don't give Mulder a girlfriend!' I hear that loud and clear. Everyone takes everything so literally. People thought I was going to give him a live-in lover. People have a tendency to overreact. My feeling about the Internet crowd in the third year is that there's a little bit of a backlash. Now that the show's been discovered by everyone, the popular thing is to take us to task for every little thing. I think

Scully investigates a serial killer who claims to be possessed by demonic forces in "Grotesque." (The gargoyle is a stature, not a creature or a vision.)



X-FILES

ACADEMIC X-PHILES

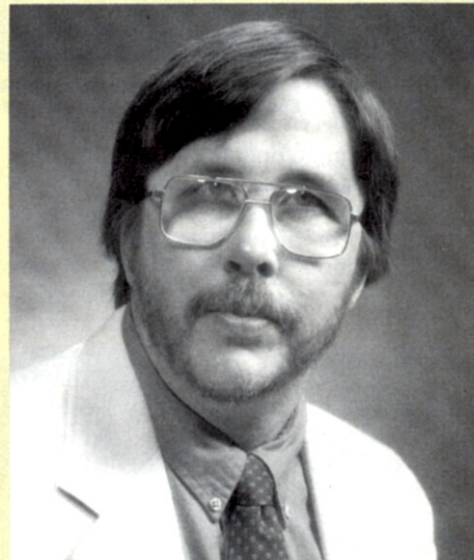
The show's dense texture leaves ample room for interpretation.

By Paula Vitaris

If former Yale English Literature Ph.D. candidate David Duchovny had remained in academia, instead of dropping out to take up acting, he might have fallen into the strange state that grips many a scholar these days: obsession with watching, analyzing, and interpreting THE X-FILES. Fans are popping up in universities and colleges all over the map, but if there is one Ivory Tower that could lay claim to being the center of X-FILES-ology, it is Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. There you will find chairman of the English Department Dr. David Lavery, Ph.D. candidate Marla Cartwright, and their colleague Jill Hague—all dedicated fans of the show. In 1992, Lavery edited *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*. Now, he and Hague and Cartwright are putting finishing touches on *The Truth Is Out There: Reading The X-Files*, to be published in September by Syracuse University Press. Lavery, whose interests lie in literary theory, film and television studies, modern poetry, and the relationship between science and fiction (he's particularly fascinated by the scientifically-minded Scully as a television character), conceived the idea of an X-FILES book in the summer of 1995 after *Full of Secrets* became the best selling book in the publishing history of Wayne State University Press.

Is it possible to conduct a valid analysis of a television series before it has ended? Lavery feels that *Reading The X-Files* may be regarded as a "preliminary report, just as Scully's reports are. The introduction will explain that the book is a work in progress, but so is television—it's the nature of serial drama."

Why so much attraction to a television show from people normally occupied by works of literature? "If your job is interpreting texts, it's refreshing to find a television show that's open to the techniques of critical inquiry and that contains enough material to yield results," said Joanne Rochester, a Ph.D candidate in English at the University of Toronto. She was captivated by show's ambiguous narrative and the visual style.



David Lavery, an English professor at Middle Tennessee State University, has put together a book of academic essays about THE X-FILES.

"We are never really sure exactly what we're looking at," she said, "There is always room for interpretation of the 'facts,' and that seems to be the foundation the show is built on. I don't mean to say that the show needs to be subjected to any specific form of critical interpretation, in order to be enjoyed. It does, however, support a certain amount of critical inquiry. The show is packed with information, all of which demands interpretation, both by the characters and the audience. Nothing is what it seems, on face value; this is what lends the show its ambiguity, which either delights or disgusts its fans, depending on their tolerance for lack of closure."

Lavery notes that when THE X-FILES first aired, critics branded it as cult television. "The appeal of cult television, film, and literature is that it honors the interpretive community experiencing it by fulfilling their sense of themselves as people able to interpret the work," he said. "This is part of THE X-FILES. It's nice for people to be able to get together—which also happens on the internet—and talk about the show. They explain it to each other and share theories, and, of course, that's what academics



Part of the show's appeal to academics is explained by its frequent literary references: for instance, in "Quagmire," a Loch Ness monster-type story, Mulder was compared to *Moby Dick's* Captain Ahab.

do. Jane Youngblood, the avant garde film theorist, used to say that entertainment gives you what you want and art gives you what you didn't know you wanted. When you think about this show, it's absolutely startling. If we take THE X-FILES seriously, then this is the deepest, most sinister conspiracy theory every offered. We don't know yet where it's going, but if they're telling us that Nazis, in collusion with the U.S. government, have sold over at least a substantial portion of the United States population for genetic experimentation with aliens—well, that makes Oliver Stone seem fairly normal!"

Rochester finds the themes of the quest romance, a Jacobean literary genre, central to THE X-FILES. "Romance, according to Patricia Parker's *Inescapable Romance*, is an open-ended narrative form driven by a quest for an ineffable, ungraspable end," she explained. "The quester, is in search of a specific goal which is never reached. The form is a narrative of infinite deferral, so that gratification, while glimpsed, is never actually achieved. Because of this, romance is an immensely flexible form—and although Mulder might not seem, at first glance, to have much in common with the Knights of Edmund Spenser, his quest for the 'Truth,' an ungraspable goal if ever there was one, is parallel to their search for the Faerie Queen. The quest romance armature of the show is what makes it work, over the long term, and provides the framework for the show's characteristic lack of closure. Even if Mulder finds out the truth about Samantha, he will still not discover the Truth with a capital 'T'; the series is by definition unendable."

Alice Palumbo, who studies Gothic literature from the 1760s to the present, said, "The show is a great example of prime-time Gothic. Mulder's viewpoint is pretty close to that found in the stories of H.P. Lovecraft, in that he believes there's an intelligence 'Out There' trying to get 'Down

Here.' Scully is, at times, a textbook case of Female Gothic—she tends to believe that whatever horrible things are being done by the Conspiracy are done by human beings. The narrative of the show provides a synthesis of both points of view. Chris Carter and the other writers, as well as the directors and production staff, synthesize contemporary fears and anxieties with archetypal plots and generic tropes."

Rochester takes delight in the show's ability to refer to its own premises and conventions, as well as its ability to stand outside itself and look at what it is doing. "I think it works with a lot of postmodern concepts—questions of perception, of narrative instability, of metatextual play," she said. "It plays with the concept of storytelling itself, the most obvious example being 'Jose Chung's From Outer Space,' which is a narrative about the way 'narrative' works. It is 'intertextual,' constantly making visual or verbal reference to other films or TV series, as well as to previous episodes of the series. The fact that the series is open to parody, particularly in Darin Morgan's episodes, is rooted not only in the myths on which it is founded—alien abduction, conspiracy theory—but on the self-referential nature of the show itself. Mulder and Scully are, in a 'normal' X-File, the only people who can see what's 'really' going on. Morgan's episodes turn this around, and place Mulder and Scully in situations which they can neither understand nor control, either placing them in situations where they become the X-factor, the inexplicable mystery, as in 'Jose Chung's From Outer Space,' or making them the normative characters, the outsiders, in a world with its own logic, as in 'Humbug.'"

The development of Mulder and Scully also piques the interest of these academics, who view them as characters with an intellectual curiosity and a life of the mind unusual for television. Palumbo sees Scully

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“My feeling about the Internet crowd is there's a feeling that it's not our show anymore, but that we're working for them. I find that interesting.”

—Producer Chris Carter—

there's a sense that it's not our show any more, but that we're working for them. I find that interesting, but I just proceed every day like I always proceed. I just try to come up with good ideas and make them into interesting stories, shoot them in an interesting way and give you the best possible show I can. So far this season I'm very proud of the work that's been done."

The third season started with a number of changes in personnel and an increase in the budget. Howard Gordon was promoted to co-executive producer, and Frank Spotnitz and Darin Morgan to story editors. Five writers came on board: producer Charles Grant Craig (who departed in the fall); story editors John Shiban and Jeff Vlaming, staff writer Kim Newton, and creative consultant Vince Gilligan. Carter had solicited a script last year from Gilligan, the author of the pyrokinesis film WILDER NAPALM. Gilligan's contribution became the episode "Soft Light." "I asked Vince if he wanted to come on staff after he wrote 'Soft Light,'" Carter recalled, "but he wanted to pursue his movie career. This year I got a call from his agent. She said Vince was interested in coming on staff now, so I scooped him right up."

The budget received a boost, due partly to salary raises but also to an increase in crew size. "Our budget right now is about \$1.5 million per episode," said Carter. "That's a couple of hundred thousand dollars more than last year, but right now we have a second unit working around the clock. We have 275 employees in Vancouver that go to work every day, probably double what we had the first season. That accounts for a lot of the extra money."

The second unit is invaluable to getting the episodes in on time and taking pressure off the first unit. Unfortunately, there is no second unit for writers or producers, who work long hours, even on weekends, to keep the show on schedule. "It's just the way it goes," said Carter. "It's just not enough time and too much work." This season began in a slightly more organized fashion than the last two, with the first eight episodes (of the 24 ordered) planned much more in advance. "I knew what I wanted, and I tried to divide the season into three sections of eight, and we had the first eight stories broken," Carter said, referring to the staff's custom of working out each plot point and emotional beat

again and again the lightning that has given him special powers. Darren and his friend Zero (Jack Black) may be the X-FILES version of Beavis and Butthead (the episode has more than a few moments of dark humor), but Gordon lets us see, in the figure of Darren's verbally abusive mother, the home life that breeds Darren's ignorance. Ribisi's performance is superb, revealing the emptiness in Darren, as well as his anger.

"Pinch me!"

—Mulder

CLYDE BRUCKMAN'S FINAL REPOSE

★★★★

10/13/95. Written by Darin Morgan. Directed by David Nutter.

A grumpy insurance salesman named Clyde Bruckman (Peter Boyle) is drawn, reluctantly, into Mulder and Scully's latest murder investigation when he finds a body stuffed into a dumpster. The murderer is targeting fortune tellers, and as Clyde has the unwanted ability to predict people's deaths, Mulder and Scully take him into protective custody. Soon, Mulder is asking Clyde, who feels it's useless to evade one's fate, to locate bodies and prevent more murders, while Scully uses more traditional methods, although a couple of intuitive leaps of her own actually save the day.

With this second script by resident humorist Darin Morgan, the X-FILES cast and crew have created one of those rare episodes where everything comes together—funny, bizarre, absurd, ironic, and sad. Peter Boyle, whose fatalistic Clyde seems overshadowed by a rain cloud, gives a performance that simply takes over the TV screen. Only actors as strong as Duchovny and Anderson, with their blissfully deadpan delivery, could withstand such a titanic presence, but withstand it they do. This episode is really told from Scully's point of view, and Anderson gives a beautifully nuanced and sensitive performance, especially in her scenes with Boyle. David Nutter, whose close-ups are the best on TV, gives her all the glamour of an old-time movie star.

But acting is just one part of this rewarding episode. The script is a gem, full of hilarious verbal and visual jokes. Each sequence is carefully constructed, with one gag leading naturally to the next, but as in the great comic films, the gags also reveal character. The scene wherein Mulder and Scully first make their appearance and meet celebrity psychic The Stupendous Yappi (an utterly hilarious performance by Duchovny's stand-in, Jaap Broeker) is a delightful illustration. The thematic underpinning, of free will versus fate, is a rich one. That the story ends in tragedy, not comedy, is fitting: the real Clyde Bruckman—a writer and director most notably associated with Buster Keaton (references to Keaton and the other comedy greats with whom Bruckman worked around here), committed suicide in 1955, and Keaton's own comedies often ended on a melancholy note.

Scully and Mulder search for the soul of an executed murderer, come back for revenge, in Carter-directed "The List," a prison-set drama.



Stuart Chernoff, husband of former X-FILES scriptwriter Sara Chernoff, plays the "homicidal maniac" in "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose."

"A woman gets lonely, sometimes she can't wait around for a man to be reincarnated."

—Scully

THE LIST

★★

10/20/95. Written and directed by Chris Carter.

Chris Carter, in his second effort as a director, paints a gorgeous picture with his camera, but in service of one of his most depressing scripts. Neech Manley (Badja Djola), a death row inmate in a Florida penitentiary, vows before his execution to return from the dead to exact revenge on a list of five people who had caused him to suffer. When a prison guard is found dead without explanation—the second of nine deaths, if you count Neech's execution—Mulder and Scully arrive to investigate. Mulder quickly learns about Manley's list from a prisoner and hypothesizes that Manley has indeed begun to carry out his vow; Scully counters there may be a conspiracy among the guards. Pragmatic Warden Brodeur (J.T. Walsh) contends the prisoners have a hand in the murders.

With his jailhouse setting, Carter returns to the themes of control, power, and imprisonment he used so movingly in his first turn as a writer-director in last year's "Duane Barry." "The List" suffers in comparison, giving us little of that first episode's unsettling ambiguity. Mulder and Scully may not know who's doing the killings, but we know it's Neech, avenging himself from beyond the grave, so there's little suspense. Instead, we're reduced to waiting for the next inevitable murder. The maggots and flies infesting the victims are traditional symbols of demons and a nicely repellent way to signal which murders can be attributed to the fiendish Neech, but the shock effect is no substitute for genuine suspense. A scene where one falling maggot clue Mulder and Scully to the location of another victim induces a welcome frisson which an entire swarm cannot.

"The List" is spread out among too large a cast of characters, all of whom seem to come directly from prison films. Walsh's hypocritical, murderous warden is a case in point, although his character serves to remind us that abuse, as so often in this show, flows down from the top. Neech never comes alive as a character, because the viewer's time with him is extremely brief; we see only his fury (which Djola conveys superbly), never his pain. He hovers uncomfortably between this world and the next, failing to engage any real interest. The only human note is struck by Mulder and Scully, whose interaction in the prison is full of warmth. But even this cannot save the story. Rarely has there been an episode in which the two agents have not been able to come to some understanding of what has passed, even if they have no proof to present to the world. At the end

of "The List," although the audience has seen both Manley and Brodeur doing their worst, Mulder and Scully are completely befuddled, leaving them—and the audience—utterly frustrated.

Although Carter's script may not be top-notch, as a director he elicits fine performances, and visually this is an absolutely stunning episode. Carter and director of photography John Bartley film Graeme Murray's set of staircases, catwalks, cells and barred doors in a series of shots so carefully composed they could be paintings. Their choice of hazy, eerie green light turns this lock-up into an altogether unworldly prison. In a series that routinely delivers fabulous images to the screen, this episode is a stand-out.

"From a dried skin sample, you're concluding—what? That he's some kind of fat-sucking vampire?"

—Scully to Mulder

2SHY

★★1/2

11/3/95. Written by Jeff Vlaming. Directed by David Nutter.

Mulder and Scully are called in to work a strange case of murder in Cleveland. Someone or something has sucked all the fatty tissue from a dead woman, leaving her corpse enveloped in an acidic glop. Her roommate mentions her friend's use of computer chat rooms, and that lead sets Mulder, Scully and Detective Alan Cross (James Handy, in a weary but sweet performance) towards finding the man, a mild-mannered translator of Italian literature named Virgil Incanto (Timothy Carhart).



The corpse of a victim in "2Shy," an episode about a mutant killer who feeds on the fatty tissue of women found on computer chat lines.

Virgil is an upscale, articulate version of first season's unforgettable liver-eater Eugene Victor Tooms. He also must kill to survive; however, he takes a nasty pleasure in romancing his insecure, overweight prey, squeezing into their lives much like Tooms squeezed into people's houses. Vlaming's script smoothly combines a number of issues that concern women, such as body image and meeting men via computer. Scully's encounter with sexism in the workplace (Detective Cross suggests that she, as a woman, might not be able to handle the case) is an apt reflection of Incanto's inability to see his victims as people.

Carhart is chilling as Incanto, although he doesn't reach the heights Doug Hutchison achieved as Tooms. Catherine Paolone is excellent as Ellen, the woman who proves his undoing, and Aloka McLean gives a touching performance as Jesse, a blind girl whose would-be poet mother (Glynis Davies) is another victim. The fourth-act battle in Ellen's bathroom between Scully and Incanto raises your pulse, but alas, it's a giveaway, because the camera made darn sure the audience knew Scully left her gun in the bedroom.

Gillian Anderson's confident performance has just the right mix of toughness and sensitivity, thrusting Scully into a number of difficult situations.

"Sometimes the only sane response to an insane world is insanity."

—Mulder

THE WALK

★★1/2

11/10/95. Written by John Shiban. Directed by Rob Bowman.

The attempted suicide of an Army lieutenant (Don Thompson) catches Mulder's interest when the officer claims a phantom soldier prevented him from killing himself. General Callahan (Thomas Kopache), the base's commander, opposes Mulder and Scully's investigation but gives in when his adjutant and his young son die in mysterious accidents, after which he also sees the phantom soldier. Mulder links the phantom to one of the hospital's chronic patients, an embittered quadruple amputee named Leonard Trimble (Ian Tracey), who Mulder believes has mastered astral projection in order to bring misery to the officers he holds responsible for his condition.

A lot of the military detail in "The Walk" is wrong, and once again Scully, a pathologist, makes a psychological diagnosis when Mulder, a psychologist, should properly be the one to do so. Their characterization is off-balance too; they are either distant from each other and the case at hand or too blatantly angry, in what looks like an attempt to draw emotion from them. Anderson does have one astonishing moment, when Scully observes a murder through a window in a locked door: she conveys, in profile yet, every notch upwards of Scully's mounting horror.



Mulder rescues a young kidnap victim in "Oubliette," an episode which explores his feelings about his own missing sister.

Otherwise, this is a solid episode about responsibility and retribution, and the guest cast is quite fine, particularly Tracey, and Andrea Barclay, as the bereaved Mrs. Callahan. The scene wherein Captain Draper (Nancy Sorel) meets her death in the swimming pool is nicely done, the wavy light recalling the pool scene in Jacques Tourneur's *CAT PEOPLE*.

"I've probably experienced just about everything once or twice. It's all been pretty temporary."

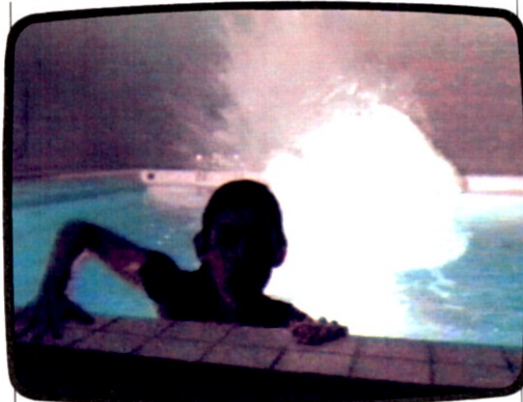
—Lucy Householder

OUBLIETTE

★★★1/2

11/17/95. Written by Charles Grant Craig. Directed by Kim Manners.

A bizarre case of empathy draws Mulder and Scully to Seattle. A woman named Lucy Householder (Tracey Ellis) bled and collapsed at the very moment when a man was kidnapping a teenage girl named Amy Jacobs (Jewel Staite) on the other side of the city; even more stranger, she incoherently babbled the very words the kidnapper was heard to speak. Lucy herself had been a kidnap victim, and when her kidnapper is identified as the same man who took Amy, Mulder becomes convinced that Lucy is experiencing whatever Amy sees and feels. He soon comes into conflict with the



In "The Walk," Captain Draper (Nancy Sorel) meets her demise in a pool, echoing a scene from Jacques Tourneur's *THE CAT PEOPLE*.

local FBI team and Scully, who feel all the evidence points to Lucy as an accomplice, not an empath.

"Oubliette" recalls "Conduit" from *THE X-FILES*' first season, although this time Mulder's identification is with two victims, not one. "Oubliette" stands on its own, however, without having to make comparisons. The relationship between Mulder and Lucy, tender and prickly at the same time, is completely believable and deeply moving as Lucy slowly grows to trust him. Tracey Ellis, with her hard-life face, her lank hair, and her soft voice, is perfect as the wounded Lucy; she is another in the *X-FILES* portrait gallery of terrific guest stars. Michael Chieffo's kidnapper, in love with photographing his victims, is totally creepy, and the scene where he takes Polaroids of his latest victim is a bone-chilling reversal of the scene in *REAR WINDOW* where Jimmy Stewart tries to fend off Raymond Burr with his flashlight. The foreshadowing of Amy's near-death in the river with Wade's giving her too much water to drink earlier on is a clever revelation of another layer to his character, and just one example of the strength of this script. The pacing seems off at times (too many scenes of people walking) and the writing for Scully is problematic at first; she seems too opposed to Mulder's interest in Lucy, and she is given no viable theory to counter Mulder's. Her decision to side with Mulder and accompany him to the river resolves that problem, but then comes a terrible mistake: the scene where Mulder and Scully administer CPR to Amy. Although Scully's giving up on Amy may make a dramatic point, it is so contrary to real medical procedure that it breaks the spell of the story and leaves the viewer gaping at her stupidity. The script makes up for it, with a melancholy but touching scene at the end between Mulder and Scully, when Scully points out that Mulder is the connection between Lucy and Amy that saved Amy. If director Kim Manners' blocking points to a lack of connection between Scully, sitting on the bed, and Mulder, gazing out the window, like Lucy in the hospital, that is in keeping with the touch-me-not spirit of this episode.

"Oh, look at this—a beacon in the night."

—Mulder, spotting the approaching Skinner

NISEI

★★★

11/24/95. Written by Chris Carter, Howard Gordon, Frank Spotnitz. Directed by David Nutter.

This very serious "mythology" episode starts off (after the opening credits) with a screamingly funny in-joke, when Scully informs Mulder that the \$29.95 alien autopsy tape he bought from some guy in Allentown, Pa., is "even hokier than the one aired on the Fox network!" And this line was delivered a mere minute or two after a commercial for a rerun of Fox's alien autopsy program! Maybe network executives do have a sense of humor after all.

Mulder's tape, however, ends not with Jonathan Frakes' ponderous narration, but the abrupt arrival of a military assassination squad into the autopsy room. A trip to Allentown to talk to the man who taped the footage off a satellite transmission propels Mulder and Scully into another chapter of the government conspiracy. The contents of a Japanese diplomat's briefcase cause them to split up, Mulder to investigate the *Talapus*, a ship tied up at Newport News, and Scully to interview the people on a list of Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) members. Separately they learn bits and pieces about a project run by Japanese doctors, former members of the notorious Unit 731, the Japanese Army unit that conducted horrific tests on human subjects during World War II. When Scully finds herself recognized by the MUFON members, she realizes she herself was one of the modern-day test subjects: all the MUFON women have had a chip implanted in their necks.

This scene with the MUFON women, at the end of Act II, is the highlight of "Nisei." The setting, a suburban home, is bland and normal, the women are indistinguishable from other women, and the lighting is clear and crisp; but the women talk about abduction, experimentation, implantation, and death. David Nutter's blocking and use of the camera creates a sense of paranoia and fear completely at odds with the everyday setting.

Some of the emotional beats in this episode seem off. Scully tells Mulder the MUFON women are sick and one is dying with the implication she could be in the same situation and he barely seems to hear her, another example of the disconnection between the two this season. The disconnection turns into physical reality when they split up once again to explore separately their own roles in the story. Scully brings the chip removed from her neck to be analyzed by FBI technician Agent Pendrell (Brendan Beiser), whose crush on the oblivious Scully is instantly endearing. Her pleas to Mulder, conveyed via cell phone, to stay away from the train carrying cross-country the Japanese doctors and their subjects fall on deaf ears.

"Nisei" is not an immediate sequel to the last two mythology episodes, "The Blessing Way" and "Paper Clip." The story starts up through sheer happenstance, with Mulder's purchase of the alien autopsy videotape, but it is clearly related through the similarity of the events surrounding the historical Operation Paperclip and Unit 731. *THE X-FILES*' mythology episodes have a sense of the past rare for television and an awareness that we are who we are, as individuals and a nation, because of the actions taken by our parents and grandparents and their parents before them. It's hard to judge the mythology episodes; they're like chapters in a book, and each ending opens up new possibilities. But they all have a gravity and a weight that compensates for the occasional niggling feeling that no conspiracy this big could ever exist because someone, somewhere, will always talk.

In "Nisei," Scully has FBI technician Pendrell (Brendan Beiser) examine a chip that was implanted in her neck during an abduction.





Roy Thinnes plays the good alien shape-shifter, put under constraints by the Cigarette Smoking Man in the season finale "Talitha Cumi."

on 3x5 cards.

For the new writers, "it's been a learning process," Carter said. "All of them are very gung-ho, determined and dedicated. We're all working together to bring their good ideas to the screen." Howard Gordon, as co-executive producer, found himself taking on more supervisory work, compared to his first two years at THE X-FILES. "I'm much more involved in the junior writers' scripts than I ever was in anything [former co-executive producers] Glen Morgan or Jim Wong did," he explained. "My job is more of a staff position now, and I've been involved in almost everything that's come up, whether supervising post-production, or editing, or rewriting a part of a script. It's much more of a group effort than it ever has been. I feel that some of my own work has suffered as a result. I haven't had a chance to cultivate that part of the job. I recognize that that's definitely part of the job description, and I know it's good training for the time when and if I have my own show. But it's frustrating—you just want to lock yourself in a room and do your thing. It makes me feel like I've earned my title at the beginning of every episode."

Essential to the smooth running of the show are in-house producers and directors that Carter has recruited over the years, who have consisted primarily of David Nutter, Rob Bowman, Kim Manners, and co-executive producer R.W. Goodwin, who oversees production in Vancouver and traditionally directs the first and last episodes each season. "It's been fantastic," Carter enthused. "It's not like when the director of the week comes in and you have to shake hands and say, 'This is how we do the job.' These guys already know. They've got a level of taste and understanding that makes my job so

X-FILES

2SHY

New writer Jeff Vlaming on providing thoughtful thrills.

By Paula Vitaris

A number of new writers joined the X-FILES staff third season, including story editor Jeff Vlaming, who contributed two scripts, "2Shy" and "Hell Money," before moving on to different pastures by season's end. As a writer on the USA channel's WEIRD SCIENCE, Vlaming had become a fan of THE X-FILES, so much so that he wrote an X-FILES spoof, "Fly Boy," for the show.

Vlaming also hoped to write the real thing: a freelance script for THE X-FILES. After submitting unread scripts, the former advertising executive decided he needed to advertise himself, and hit upon an unusual plan to get his foot inside the door. He cut a sponge into the shape of an alien, stuck it inside a pickle jar, covered it with a paper bag and attached a note which declared, "My God, Mulder, it's trying to communicate!" Remove the bag, and there sat the alien, holding up a little sign announcing, "Jeff Vlaming's ready to pitch." Two days later, his agent called and told him he had a meeting with Carter. "It worked better than expected!" Vlaming recalled. "Chris told me, 'This is a visual show, and you think visually. That's really important.'"

One of the ideas Vlaming pitched, which eventually became "2Shy," won him a place on the writing staff. "2Shy" is the story of mutant, Virgil Incanto (Timothy Carhart), who can only find sustenance in human fatty tissue. In Vlaming's original conception, Virgil sucked the oil, rather than the fat, leaving people "withered and husky," according to Vlaming.

Virgil, in his original oil-consuming incarnation, sprang from some medical reading Vlaming had done about the sebaceous, or oil-producing, glands. He combined that with an image in his mind of a man and a woman in a car, and the man killing the woman by sucking the oil from her—an image which eventually found its way into the teaser. After oil-sucking changed to fat-sucking at Carter's suggestion, Vlaming again hit the medical books, including volumes his wife, an occupational therapist, had bought for her classes. "When Scully



Jeff Vlaming's second of two X-FILES scripts, "Hell Money," in which Scully and Mulder aid Chinatown detective B.D. Wong, examines issues similar to those explored in the superior 2SHY.

goes, 'I don't know how to explain such accelerated autolysis,' my wife said, 'Like anyone would talk like that!' Vlaming laughed. "And Howard Gordon said, 'Scully sounded a little too textbook here.' But that's the point: I wanted to make Scully sound like she knows what she is talking about. But when it came to Virgil, we never really explained his condition, and intentionally so, because any explanation would have come off as sounding kind of silly."

Virgil is able to operate in privacy, working out of his apartment as a translator of Italian literature. His name is a reference to the great Roman poet and guide in Dante's INFERNO. "As for his last name, I took a few years of Italian and remember nothing of it, other than the fact that I had an Italian-English dictionary somewhere. I was looking for certain words, and Incanto



Scully and Mulder follow a trail of clues in "2Shy" (left) that eventually lead to Virgil Incanto (above).

means enchantment. It was an interesting name and had a certain subtext."

One of the creepiest aspects of "2Shy" is the way Virgil finds his victims: he scouts out overweight women, hunting them down by logging onto computer networks under names like "Timid" and "2Shy," dropping into chat rooms where he expects to find the desperately lonely and vulnerable. "I always thought it was intriguing how people met and often married through the personals in newspaper columns," Vlaming said. "It's pretty much a shot in the dark. You could be meeting anyone. What if you met the perfect guy, but he wasn't the perfect guy? It translated perfectly from the newspaper personals to topical internet chat rooms. I don't surf the net, but my cousin's a huge fanatic about it. I thought this would be the perfect avenue for Virgil. You can say just the right things without seeing who is saying them. And then he turns out to be a handsome guy. We waffled back and forth on that. Should he be this phantom who stays in the shadows? Someone said, 'No, he should be pretty good-looking, not James Bond or anything, but someone good-looking.' And for these women, it's like, 'Wow, this guy turns out nice, and he wants to date me!'"

"I can't deny there's the specter of Tooms looming over this whole thing," Vlaming admitted. "Tooms was an animal, whereas this guy was urbane and dressed nicely. That would be the flip side, even though Tooms certainly looked like the guy next door. But he wasn't conversational and while both of them seem fairly animalistic when they're on the attack, Virgil's methodology appealed to me. The victims walked right into it, and when they were cornered, then they were done for."

As a subplot, Vlaming has Virgil's attitude towards women mirrored in Scully's relationship with Cleveland detective Alan Cross (James Handy). Although Cross is well-meaning, he makes patronizing remarks to Scully concerning her ability, as a woman, to work on the case of a serial killer who targets women. Vlaming explained, "The one thing we thought was missing was development of Detective Cross. Rather than having him be a poor slob who is going

to get killed at the end of the second act, we set up this animosity between him and Scully. It gave Scully a good opportunity to hang tough. We knew she would, of course, and she does it without haranguing the guy and chopping him off at the knees. She handled it perfectly. It was a good, quiet way for her to assert her authority."

Another element in Vlaming's script was the introduction of Virgil's building manager, Monica (Glynis Davies), who irks him not only because she's quite slender—and thus not a potential meal—but also because she's nosy and, worst of all, wants him to evaluate her poetry. Although Monica at first provides some comic relief, Virgil catches her snooping about his apartment and kills her. One of the episode's most affecting scenes occurs when a sympathetic Scully interviews Jesse, Monica's blind daughter, who earlier had expressed her distaste for Incanto because he smelled "gross." Vlaming had wanted to eliminate Jesse's blindness, but Carter felt differently. "Everyone was offering suggestions, such as, 'Get rid of the blind girl,' but Chris said, 'No, I think the blind girl's good,' for no real reason other than Jesse being able to say, 'There's something about the guy upstairs.' I thought it was sort of gothic: 'the smitten landlady and her blind daughter.' But what did appeal to me was the idea about Jesse's sense of smell. Everyone else said, 'He's handsome; he's charming,' but she's immune to his looks and his charms. She catches something about him that none of us do, and then because of it she brings the whole case crashing down on top of him."

With "2Shy" behind him, Vlaming went to work on his second X-FILES script, "Hell Money," which examined issues similar to those in "2Shy." Once again, a sophisticated, educated man (a medical doctor) exploits a marginalized community, in this case newly arrived, poverty-stricken Chinese immigrants. Not as strong as "2Shy," "Hell Money" still has its virtues, and although Vlaming is no longer with X-FILES, his brief tenure will be remembered. □

“The end of last year became a template for the way we run things around here. It’s much more of a group effort than it’s ever been.”

—Co-producer Howard Gordon—

much easier. I'm just so thankful to have those guys."

One person who won't be directing an episode is David Lynch. An Internet rumor—that-wouldn't-die had fans speculating over a purported Lynch assignment and a possible crossover between X-FILES and Lynch's defunct TWIN PEAKS. "I thought it was an interesting rumor," Carter sighed. "I've never spoken to or met David Lynch, nor do I know what he thinks of the show." Carter is somewhat aghast at the power of online rumormongering. "I had to answer phone calls from the ASPCA the other day!" he grumbled, referring to a false story posted to the Internet newsgroup alt.tv.x-files claiming that kittens had been burned to death in an accidental pet store fire during the filming of an episode.

The third season opened with two of its biggest "mythology" episodes, "The Blessing Way" and "Paper Clip." A continuation of "Anasazi," the second season cliffhanger, they were packed with events so life-altering for Mulder and Scully that fans were left reeling. The episode following "Paper Clip," a stand-alone called "D.P.O.," gave Mulder and Scully no opportunity to mull over the changes in their lives. "I feel like the story itself is kind of thin," admitted Howard Gordon, who wrote the episode. "Coming off of 'The Blessing Way' and 'Paper Clip' was a tough act to follow. I was a big fan, particularly of 'The Blessing Way,' and I think I was a little intimidated by it, frankly. I think that's one of the reasons why the fans didn't embrace 'D.P.O.' Who cares about some guy throwing lightning in the midwest after what Mulder and Scully have been through? Some people looked at it as a good, old-fashioned X-FILES, but others said, 'How can they ignore the fact that Scully lost a sister and Mulder's lost a father and they've seen spaceships and aliens?'"

Carter claimed that THE X-FILES "is not soap opera. You can play with time in series television, which means you don't know how much time went by between 'Paper Clip' and 'D.P.O.' Even though it was a week of our life, it could have been six months for Mulder and Scully, so a lot of things could have been resolved. I thought that we needed to get back and tell some stand-alone episodes. You can't keep this mythology thing up forever. As popular as

"But I'm not a very good shot, and when I miss, I tend to miss low."

—Mulder to the Red-Haired Man

731

★★★1/2

12/1/95. Written by Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Rob Bowman.

A scene more disturbing than anything else previously seen on THE X-FILES opens the second half of this conspiracy two-parter: soldiers round up, then massacre, helpless, pajama-clad prisoners, stirring our collective memory of photographs and movie footage chronicling the horrors of genocide: the Holocaust, Cambodia, Bosnia. The only teaser to even come close in horror was last season's "The Calusari," which showed us the ultimate TV no-no: killing a child. But there is something different about these prisoners; they look like alien Grays.

Once past the teaser, this is a swiftly-paced installment, cutting back and forth between Mulder, who has made his way into the train he jumped on top of in "Nisei," and Scully, who has traveled to the camp in West Virginia and discovered an open pit filled with the massacre victims. A gripping scenario ensues, with Mulder locking himself and the Red-Haired Man (Stephen McHattie), an assassin first seen in "Nisei," into the train car containing the creature brought on board in "Nisei," while Scully is escorted to a similar car by The Elder, a member of the Consortium, and told this is where she was brought during her abduction.

The dispute over the phone between Mulder and Scully concerning the identity of the creature in the train car (Mulder thinks it is a human/alien hybrid; Scully believes it to be a human deformed by experimentation) form the core of this episode, and exposes the conflict in their belief systems and approach to their experiences. It also re-establishes, for the purpose of the larger drama of THE X-FILES, the rationale for Scully's adherence to the completely human origins of her abduction.

There is a more immediate crisis at hand. Not only does the Red-Haired Man want to kill Mulder and the creature confined behind a locked door, but there is a bomb in the train car. The bomb may be a plot contrivance to screw up the tension levels, but it's a very effective one, and it's a neat twist that Mulder, unlike the usual action hero, is unable to disarm it. Not surprisingly, Mulder survives, thanks to a Deus X Machina, but we still get our ration of visceral thrills when that train car blows to kingdom come. Sadly, it takes the innocent little creature with it.

The final scene between Mulder and Scully, as they realize their evidence is gone and they are once more empty-handed, is beautifully written and acted. "Apology is policy" is a line well worth remembering, and a fitting substitute for the show's usual tagline of "The Truth Is Out There."

Michael Berryman (THE HILLS HAVE EYES) is a stand-out in "Revelations," as a handyman whose appearance hides a gentle soul.



Soldiers escort aliens as part of a government cover-up to hide their existence in "731," the conclusion of the previous episode, "Nisei."

"Mulder, would you do me a favor? Would you smell Mr. Jarvis?"

—Scully

REVELATIONS

★★★1/2

12/15/95. Written by Kim Newton. Directed by David Nutter.

Scully and Mulder protect a young Ohio boy named Kevin Kryder (Kevin Zegers) who they fear may be the next victim of a murderer (Kenneth Walsh) who has killed eleven false stigmatics. To Scully's astonishment, Kevin's stigmatic wounds appear to be genuine, and when she observes a series of seeming impossible phenomena, including an incorruptible body accompanied by a floral scent, she begins to consider the possibility that miracles really do happen.

Scully's search to reconcile her religious beliefs and her scientific training makes for powerful drama, and Gillian Anderson is up to the challenge. She gives a terrific performance, letting us see all of Scully's emotions as she is torn between her heart and her head. Her dialogues with Mulder, cast for once as the disbeliever, are particularly fascinating, as they struggle with positions strangely opposite from the ones they usually take. Mulder's skepticism is credible, having been shown in past episodes to disdain organized religion, but his attitude towards Scully is inconsistent, acting sympathetically in some scenes, but in others condescendingly.

Michael Berryman is simply wonderful as Owen Jarvis, the handyman whose frightening appearance conceals a pure and noble soul.

The episode bogs down when it comes to the plot. The killer, an Atlanta businessman named Simon Gates (Kenneth Walsh), has the power to conduct great heat, and when he strangles his victims, he burns his fingerprints right into their flesh. He can also bend the iron window bars. Mulder, who normally would be fascinated by this unexplainable phenomenon, barely seems interested. Kevin is an odd choice for a stigmatic; there's nothing particularly saintly about him. The only trait that distinguishes him from any other child is his ability to spin a tale. Unfortunately, Kevin Zegers gives an extremely self-conscious performance; he is unable to hint at anything beneath the surface of the dialogue. The death of his mother (well played by Hayley Tyson) barely affects this boy. The ending is a real mess: Scully conveniently figures out Gates has taken Kevin to a nearby recycling plant by linking a cryptic message, spoken by Kevin's mentally ill father, to a logo she spots on a conveniently placed recycling bin. She dashes off alone, without backup, and manages to save the day; then asks Mulder to make a statement for her, even though he wasn't even near the recycling plant. But this nonsense sets up a simply wonderful scene: Scully's visit to a church and her confession to a priest of all her fears and doubts. All complaints melt away before Anderson's deeply felt acting. If only the external narrative had matched the trajectory of Scully's

pilgrim's progress. Then we'd have an episode to equal "Beyond the Sea" and "Irresistible." Those episodes, and "Revelations," were directed David Nutter, who always inspires Anderson to her very best. After "Revelations" he moved on to Chris Carter's new show MILLENNIUM; with any luck he'll be back directing more X-FILES next season.

"...and suddenly you see reality, as it, you know, really exists."

—Dude

THE WAR OF THE COPROPHAGES

★★★1/2

1/5/96. Written by Darin Morgan. Directed by Kim Manners.

What do Mulder and Scully do on the weekend? Mulder escapes the fumigation of his apartment building by observing UFO hot spots in Miller's Grove, Massachusetts (an homage to the Grover's Mill, N.J., locale of Orson Welles' WAR OF THE WORLDS). Scully bathes her dog, cleans her gun, eats dinner and chats with Mulder on the phone. But Mulder's idyll is interrupted when his assistance is requested by the local sheriff in the investigation of an unusual death. A witness claims cockroaches are the culprits. Before long, Mulder is theorizing about cockroach robots from outer space, but Scully keeps heading him off at the pass—by phone—with completely logical explanations for each death. It isn't until Mulder meets Dr. Bambi Berenbaum (Bobbie Phillips), a beautiful entomologist working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, that Scully decides she really must pack a bag and head north.



"War of Coprophages": Mulder is seen from the insect-eye-view of killer cockroaches, which he believes to be alien robotic probes.

Writer Darin Morgan and director Kim Manners carefully crank up the comic tension, until the entire town is ready to burst, and burst it does in a convenience store riot that has to be the funniest thing on TV this year, with the sensible Scully utterly ineffectual at putting a stop to the nonsense. And that's only the prelude to an even bigger, and much messier, explosion.

Each gag is driven by a case of comic misperception, whether on the part of the viewer, or by the characters. Often the joke stems from a misperception about oneself, beginning with Dr. Bigger's pronouncement in the teaser that human beings, unlike roaches, are capable of self-illumination. By the end of the episode, that observation is definitely open to debate. The visuals underscore the differing points of view, especially shots like the roach's-eye view of a Mulder multiplied into dozens of Mulders.

This lightest and most farcical of Morgan's scripts does not plumb the emotional depths of his other episodes, and it has a more classically comic ending, with the incipient and incongruous liaison of luscious Dr. Berenbaum (who's barely glanced at Mulder, though he's struck dumb by her) and wheelchair-bound Dr. Newton. Mulder's parting comment to Scully that she smells bad falls flat, however; it's just too mean-spirited to work.

"I am not going to be humiliated by you, in front of you, or by having to bring in a teenage girl on her birthday, of all days, to identify the bones of her dead dog Mr. Tippy!"

—Scully to Mulder

SYZYGY

★1/2

1/26/96. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Rob Bowman.

Reports of cult killings bring Mulder and Scully to Comity, New Hampshire. Their suspicions fall on Margi and Terri, high school cheerleaders whose statements about satanic rituals are suspiciously similar. As the town's panic mounts, Mulder and Scully's partnership turns hostile, and they begin to act strangely, with Scully taking to cigarettes and Mulder to drink. A local astrologer suggests that a rare alignment of the planets may account for the uncharacteristic behavior of the town.



One of the horrific images in "Grotesque," a dark tale about a serial killer who claims to have been possessed by demonic forces.

"Syzygy," yet another comic episode, is a lost opportunity. The best moments, with the exception of the amusing scenes with cheerfully blasé astrologer Madame Zirinka (Denalda Williams), are the genuinely scary ones, especially the scene showing a boy crushed to death underneath the high school gym bleachers. If the rest of the episode had been played straight, then this could have been a horror classic. As it is, the jokes fall flat, because the humor exists in a vacuum. A prime example is the doctor in drag: a man is not funny just because he's in woman's clothing; there has to be some kind of reaction from the other characters. For proof, look no further than David Duchovny, in his pre-X-FILES days, as Denise/Dennis Bryson in TWIN PEAKS. It's the reaction of his colleagues that make Bryson's appearance such a side-splitter.

The relationship of Mulder and Scully is, in a word, ugly. For those who treasure the witty spats of Hepburn and Tracy, the dialogue in "Syzygy" induces cringes. If this had been a serious episode, the sniping might have worked, had Mulder and Scully gained some new knowledge of themselves through this confusing experience. But they're still snapping at each other in the final shot.

The episode's climax, a *melée* in the police station choreographed to Khatchaturian's *Sabre Dance*, could not be more heavy-handed or more obvious. Compare it with the hilarious riot in "The War of the Coprophages"—hilarious because Scully is there to react to it. In fact, much of "Syzygy" can be compared to "Coprophages," to the former's detriment: there are killings in a small town; people panic; Mulder meets a woman; and Scully is jealous—professionally jealous, of course.

Some of the humor works. The scene wherein Scully puffs away on a cigarette and Mulder mixes a truly disgusting screwdriver is amusing, primarily due to Anderson and Duchovny, who are masters of milking the comic deadpan. Duchovny is especially good, with his ever-languid Mulder now on what looks like a seven-second tape delay. A drink in Mulder's hands serves as a reminder of Bill Mulder's drinking in "Anasazi." What would this

scene have been like if played straight?.

Wendy Benson and Lisa Robin Kelley are dead on as Margi and Terri, and make their otherwise stereotypical characters work. Again, one can't help imagining how truly frightening their witness statement scene would have been, had this been a different type of episode.

The cinematography from John Bartley, is lovely, particularly in the first act funeral scene, aglow with a golden light unusual for this show.

"I wouldn't want to disappoint you by not disappointing you."

—Mulder to former boss Bill Patterson

GROTESQUE

★★★1/2

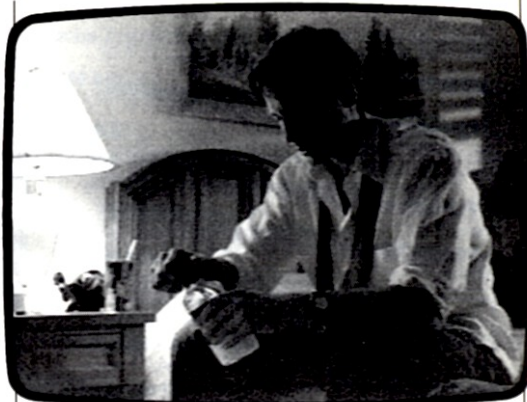
2/2/96. Written by Howard Gordon. Directed by Kim Manners.

A three-year hunt for a serial murderer ends with the arrest of John Mostow (Levani), but a disturbing twist threatens to undo the case's closure: a new body is found displaying the same facial mutilations as Mostow's victims. Mostow claims that he was possessed by a demon who has moved on to a new host and that his obsessive drawing and sculpturing of gargoyles was a desperate attempt to ward the demon off. Mulder finds himself on the case when his former boss at the Investigative Service Unit, Bill Patterson (an excellent Kurtwood Smith) requests his assistance from Skinner. Immediately it's like old times: hostility radiates from Patterson, who despises Mulder's methods as much as he needs them. In the middle of this personality clash stands a worried Scully, fearing for Mulder's sanity, as he submerges himself into the murderer's mind, sleeping at Mostow's studio, pouring over his drawings, trying some sculpting of his own. Between his obsessive behavior and some troubling physical evidence that points to Mulder's possible involvement in yet another murder, she begins to doubt his ability to differentiate between himself and his prey.

This episode, one of the darkest ever in tone and visual design, resembles last season's "Irresistible" in the ambiguity of its demon, glimpsed momentarily by Mulder: it's real, all right, but whether its place of origin lies within or without the human heart and imagination remains unanswered. It is also a fascinating look back at how troublesome life must have been for a maverick like Mulder when he joined the FBI, at how truly obsessive and conflicted he is, and at how the dark entices him. His assault on the helpless Mostow is extremely disturbing—a flashback to his loss of control with Duane Barry. Duchovny is superb at communicating each step of Mulder's deterioration; one wishes the episode could have lasted another half hour, to make his descent more gradual and to give Duchovny the opportunity to display even more shades to Mulder's fracturing personality. Anderson is equally good showing Scully at her supportive best.

"Grotesque" is a triumph for director Manners, cinematographer Bartley, and the X-FILES art

The eyes of an alien in "Piper Maru," an effect achieved by mechanical effects supervisor Dave Gauthier and visual effects supervisor Mat Beck.



Under the influence of an unusual alignment of stars and planets, Mulder resorts to some uncharacteristic behavior in "Syzygy."

department. The predominant blue tones, the manipulation of light and dark, the swirling camera, the hundreds of drawings and sculptures of gargoyles—all serve to reveal character, accelerate the tension, and breed an overwhelming sense of dread. Mark Snow's score is also one of his best. Alas, this truly fine episode ends on an intrusive note, a superfluous voice-over from Mulder philosophizing again on the nature of evil. He spells out what the camera is saying a hundred times more effectively with its final shot of a painting of a gargoyle.

"We bury our dead alive, don't we?"

—Commander Johansen

PIPER MARU

★★★

2/9/96. Written by Frank Spotnitz & Chris Carter. Directed by Rob Bowman.

THE X-FILES' conspiracy storyline advances in another two-parter, beginning with Skinner telling an outraged Scully the investigation into Melissa's murder has been suspended for lack of leads. Frustrated but unable to act, Scully plunges into what looks like another Mulder wild goose chase: determining the cause of the strange burns suffered by the crew of the *Piper Maru*. Mulder's attention is caught by the ship's original position, the very spot where the Talapus (from "Nisei") retrieved what he believes to be a UFO. By the end of the hour, Mulder and Scully have learned that something—or someone—indeed was at the bottom of the sea, something that caused the crew of the *Zeus Faber*, a World War II sub, to experience the same fatal burns as the *Piper Maru* crew. Mulder and Scully split up once more: Mulder to follow a woman named Jerri Kallenchuk (Jo Bates) who may know the secret behind the retrieved UFO; Scully to talk with an old family friend, Commander Johansen, who may be guarding the same secrets. Meanwhile, the conspirators focus their attention on Skinner in a most unpleasant way.

This swiftly-moving episode has a number of outstanding action sequences. First is Mulder's encounter with Jerri, a tough-talking, '90s film noir dame, happy to keep a finger on the trigger of the shotgun fastened to the underside of her desk. Their interaction in a Hong Kong restaurant crackles with anticipation, and it's great fun to see Jerri's sarcasm annoy Mulder to the point that he is driven to manhandle her. Jerri meets a bad end a minute later, during an enormously exciting sequence at her Hong Kong office (shot in lurid blues and reds by John Bartley). Mulder's furious confrontation at the airport with Krycek is also a keeper. It's regrettable that the next plot turn hinges on a major writing blunder, when Mulder stupidly allows Krycek to clean up in the bathroom by himself.

Satisfying though Mulder's adventures may be, it is Scully's scenes that lend "Piper Maru" an emotional depth. Her anger over the filing away of Melissa's murder investigation, her flashback to a

“We didn’t have a chance in hell of winning [an Emmy award]. I saw what they were picking, and it seemed they were more mainstream.”

—Producer Chris Carter—

those mythology episodes are, that’s not why a lot of people watch THE X-FILES. You have to give people a variety, and I thought that if we could change the from ‘Paper Clip’ to ‘D.P.O.’, it would allow people to say, ‘Okay, we’re back into the X-Files themselves, not just what the government is trying to prevent Mulder and Scully from finding out.’

Gordon agreed that varying the type of episode is best for the show. “One of ways that X-FILES has distinguished itself is in our very wide palette,” he said. “We can go from ‘The Blessing Way’ to ‘D.P.O.’ to ‘Clyde Bruckman’s Final Repose’ to ‘The Walk.’ This is reductive, but we basically have three types of episodes. There are the stand-alone episodes. There are the thriller-conspiracy-mythology episodes, like ‘Anasazi’ and ‘Nisei,’ which piece together the mythology of what the X-Files are and also Mulder and his quest. And we have the lighter shows, like ‘Clyde Bruckman’s Final Repose’ and ‘Humbug’ [both written by Darin Morgan], although that doesn’t mean they aren’t the ultimately the deepest. I think ‘Clyde Bruckman’s Final Repose’ is perhaps the deepest episode we’ve ever done. I loved it; it was one of those where everything worked. The casting and the writing was exquisite. Peter Boyle was terrific. It was one of the things that I was very proud to be associated with and frankly a little jealous of. The writer in me wished I had written it, which is always a good thing. But you watch NYPD BLUE or ER—for the most part, the tones of the episodes are consistent. I think our inconsistency is one of our strong suits. We have a tremendous range, and the audience doesn’t know what it’s going to get, whether you get a creepy monster show like ‘2Shy’ or ‘The Walk,’ or whether you’re going to get a reluctant psychic.”

Another consideration in separating stand-alone episodes from mythology episodes is syndication. THE X-FILES has already signed a deal with Fox’s cable channel, fx, to the tune of \$600,000 per episode. Beginning in fall 1997, the syndicated episodes will re-run out of sequence. “So you can’t keep referencing yourself,” Carter noted, “Even though the characters have to be true to a certain progression, you

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X-FILES

OUBLIETTE

The story behind Charles Grant Craig’s abduction-empath episode.

Oubliette” is the only X-FILES episode written by Charles Grant Craig, who joined the show third season, then left shortly before filming commenced on his script. “Oubliette” introduces Lucy Householder, an alienated woman still trying to put her life back together years after her escape from a five-year imprisonment in the basement of a remote house in Washington state. Her abductor, Carl Wade (Michael Chieffo) remains at large. When Wade kidnaps Amy Jacobs, Lucy unexpectedly experiences, both physically and emotionally, everything Amy experiences. It doesn’t take long for Mulder to track down a reluctant Lucy and attempt to persuade her to help find Wade. Scully and members of the local F.B.I. see her as a suspect, especially after a DNA test places Amy’s blood on Lucy’s clothes, even though, as Mulder points out, Lucy was not only miles from the scene of the kidnapping but had suffered a nosebleed.

In Tracey Ellis’ wrenching portrayal, Lucy becomes not just a bitter woman but a vulnerable human being. “When Charlie came up with the idea, Lucy was a little more hard-boiled,” said Chris Carter. “But then you find an actor like Tracey Ellis, and the hurt plays on her face. So the character had the same lines of dialogue, but the take on them, by virtue of Tracey’s casting, was very interesting. Tracey played a more wounded person. I had imagined a person who was all compensation, who had a tough, impenetrable shell.”

Lucy is not the only character for whom the case opens old wounds. Both Lucy and Amy serve as reminders to Mulder of his missing sister, Samantha. A heated discussion between Mulder and Scully brings Mulder’s personal stake in the case out into the open, when Scully suggests that Mulder is becoming too involved because of his sister. Mulder’s linking the two is “obvious from the very beginning,” said Carter, referring to the scene wherein Amy’s mother she asks him angrily, “How could you really know how I feel?” “The camera comes around Mulder and we all know how he could know,” Carter said. “That sets up the whole story, including the scene later on when Scully



Mulder rescues kidnap victim Amy (Jewel Staite) in “Oubliette.”

says, ‘This is about your sister,’ and Mulder gives her a speech about not everything coming down to a childhood incident. David and I talked about that. He actually ad-libbed that big speech. He didn’t want Mulder’s motivations to be so simple. We had been there before, in ‘Conduit’ [a first season episode about an abducted girl] and there was new terrain to be discovered. It was a good choice.”

Curiously, although Scully is herself an abduction victim, the script and Gillian Anderson’s performance do not emphasize any identification Scully might have had with Lucy. “We could have played that angle, but it didn’t come out in the 44 minutes we had,” Carter said. “All the evidence pointed overwhelmingly in favor of Lucy’s involvement in the crime. The blood was the most damning piece. Scully wanted to believe Mulder until that point and then felt that he had stepped over a line. But she was gentle about it. She didn’t put her foot down.”

In the end, not even Mulder’s own empathy for Lucy can save her from the memories rekindled by her empathic connection. When Amy is drowned by Wade (who is then shot by Mulder), she is revived by Lucy, a mile away, who absorbs the water into her own lungs. “In order to outrun this guy, she had to die,” Carter concluded. “She had to save this other girl. That’s the tragedy in the story.”

Paula Vitaris

X-FILES

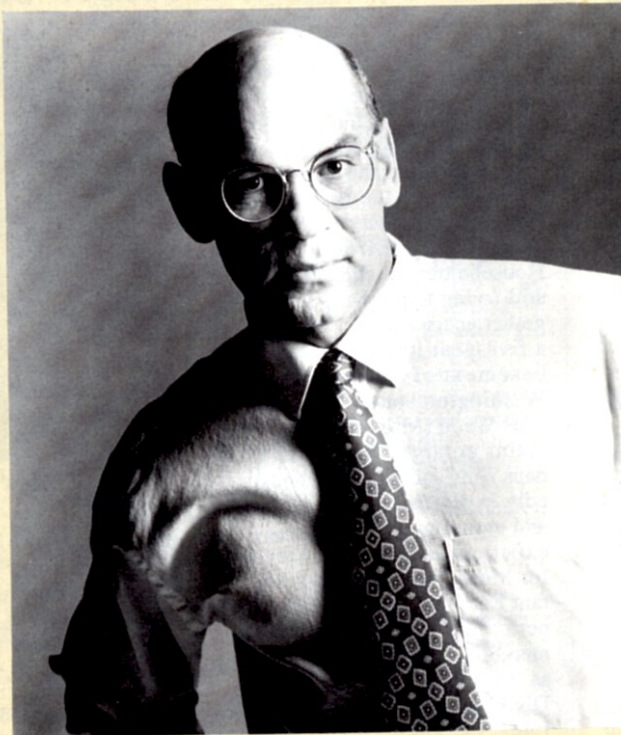
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SKINNER

Mitch Pileggi on his character's growing popularity.

Thanks to Mitch Pileggi's robust portrayal, FBI Assistant Director Walter Sergei Skinner has emerged as one of THE X-FILES' most popular supporting characters. His fan following has grown with each appearance, particularly skyrocketing after last season's "End Game," when Skinner stepped out from behind his desk to engage in a memorable fistfight with X (Steven Williams), and this season's "Paper Clip," when he proclaimed to the Smoking Man (William B. Davis), "This is where you pucker up and kiss my ass!" Speculation about Skinner soared to a new high after the April 26 broadcast of "Avatar," an episode that brought to light many details about his personal life.

Pileggi attributes Skinner's popularity to the tension his conflicts with Mulder, Scully, the Smoking Man and X bring to the show. "It has plenty of dramatic tension as it is, but it's just another avenue for them to look down," he explained. The audience's appreciation of Skinner's allegiance to Mulder and Scully received a big boost in "The Blessing Way" and "Paper Clip," when Skinner hides from the Smoking Man a crucial DAT tape. Although the tape is taken forcibly from him, Skinner is still able to beat the Smoking Man by telling him members of the Navajo Nation have memorized the contents and are prepared to reveal them if harm should come to Mulder and Scully. Despite Skinner's actions, Scully has doubts in "The Blessing Way," because not only has she no idea he is safeguarding the tape, but he has placed her on suspension. According to Pileggi, "There are a lot of things Skinner can't control," he said. "He's got a lot of people that he has to answer to. This is something that was pushed on him, and he wanted Scully to understand that. Then she came back at him with, 'You overestimate your position in the chain of command,' and that just crushed him, because I think that he cares very much for both Mulder and Scully. For her to club him over the head with something like that was painful."

By the end of "The Blessing Way," Scully's trust in Skinner has eroded so drastically that she pulls a gun on him. When he responds by aiming his weapon at her, the episode ends in a cliffhanger stand-off that left the fans gasping for air. The scene resumes in "Paper Clip" with Mulder, gun drawn, bursting into the room. "Scully pointing her gun at Skinner was, once again, crushing for him," Pileggi said. "That's



Mitch Pileggi plays FBI director Walter Sergei Skinner.

why, when they leave, he gives her this look that says, 'I can't believe you didn't trust me, and you got to the point where you had to pull a gun on me.' He's making every effort he can to help them and they keep rebuking him."

The "pucker up and kiss my ass!" scene is a Pileggi favorite. "When I read that, I said, 'All right! Finally, I got to tell the Smoking Man what I feel! The dialogue was perfect.'" Another favorite "Paper Clip" scene communicated a completely contrasting tone. Skinner arrives at a remote diner to meet Mulder and Scully, who have been on the run. He tells them he has brokered a deal that will permit them to return to work. "It felt really good. It was three people sitting down, just talking about the stuff that's going on. Skinner pretty much laid it on the line. I think that if ever he was able to reveal to Mulder and Scully how sincere he was in helping them, it was there. I don't know if they ever believe him, just like I think some of the fans still don't believe him. No matter what he does, they still think that he's got something up his sleeve or that he's got ulterior motives."

Later, Skinner unexpectedly encounters Krycek, the Hispanic Man (Lenny Britos), and a third accomplice, who assault him and steal the tape. "Like the elevator fight with X from 'End

Game,' it was in a small area. The guy who was garroting me was shorter than I was, so he was sticking his knee in my back and pulling me back, and then Nic Lea was hitting me. Fortunately, I was able to take out the other guy or I probably would have had been hit myself. I finally had to tell the guy garroting me, 'I have a bad back and it's killing me.' We finally worked it out where I drove him back into the wall, which took some of the pressure off."

Skinner's next episode was "Nisei," the first of another conspiracy theory two-parter. In Allentown, Pennsylvania, Mulder and Scully have apprehended a man they believe to be an assassin. Skinner arrives unexpectedly to inform them the man is a Japanese diplomat, and he has been forced to travel up to Allentown to smooth over what has become an embarrassing international incident. Pileggi said, "I don't think Skinner had any idea what they were doing up there, and then when Mulder gives him the 'We're checking out some video pirating thing,' Skinner's reaction is, 'Right. Here we go again.'"

After "Nisei," Skinner popped up fairly regularly during the rest of the season. In "Grotesque" he shared a short but

touching scene with Scully, and in "Pusher" he found himself at the mercy of the size-seven heels of Holly (Julie Arkos), an FBI computer technician under the hypnotic influence of villain Robert Modell (Robert Wisden). And the conspiracy heated up once more with significant consequences for Skinner, first in "Piper Maru," when he was shot by the Hispanic Man and then in "Avatar," a story that cast Skinner in the role of murder suspect. The murder, of course, is engineered by the Smoking Man in order to frame Skinner and discredit the X-Files, but Mulder and Scully's investigations open up for the audience a number of revelations about Skinner's personal life: his impending divorce, his sleep disorder, and his persistent fear of a vision of an old woman that has haunted him for years.

Pileggi acknowledged that, as much as he loves being on THE X-FILES, the show is not about his character and he doesn't expect to be in every episode. "The show is set up in such a way, I think, and intelligently so, that you don't dwell upon the conspiracy for a whole season. There's a diversity here that I think is very important, so people don't get bored with any one aspect of it. Because as soon as you get done with one thing, then you go on to something else, so it just keeps it fresh." **Paula Vitaris**



In "Apocrypha" Scully visits Skinner in the hospital, where he is recovering from a gunshot wound in the previous episode "Piper Maru."

young Melissa, and her reminisces with Johansen finally give us, after many months, an idea of what she is thinking and feeling about her sister's death.

The conception of the alien is devilishly clever. Those ink-cloud eyes, an effect achieved by mechanical effects supervisor Dave Gauthier and visual effects supervisor Mat Beck, are wonderfully creepy. This alien is different from the morphing aliens of "Colony" and "End Game"—it takes over your body physically, instead of impersonating you—but the effect is the same: the person you think you know may not be who he seems.

"We show talent for these G-man activities."
—Langly

APOCRYPHA ★★★
2/2/96. Written by Frank Spotnitz & Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners.

1953: Three young men are questioning a horribly burned, terrified crewman about the events onboard the *Zeus Faber* seven years ago. By the end of this teaser, we find, to our shock, that two of the men are Bill Mulder and the Cigarette Smoking Man. The identity of the third man—Deep Throat?—is unknown. Through facial expressions and a few words, we see that even this early, Bill Mulder and the Smoking Man are treading different paths, and we begin to understand how they arrived at their final meeting in "Anasazi."

There is much to enjoy in "Apocrypha" when it returns to the present, but nothing quite as startling as that teaser. The plots twists its way through so many alleyways that on first viewing it's a bit confusing. Mulder and Scully are reunited after Mulder returns to the U.S., with the alien-possessed Krycek in tow. The alien-Krycek escapes to find the Cigarette Smoking Man and hands over the still-missing DAT tape in exchange for transport to his ship, now housed at an abandoned missile silo in North Dakota. Skinner is recovering from the gunshot wound inflicted in "Piper Maru" by the Hispanic Man, but when he is abducted out of the hospital by that shady character, Scully not only comes to rescue but finally captures the man who shot her sister. Anderson is terrific in this scene, pounding down the street after the ambulance, shooting the Hispanic Man, and resisting the overwhelming temptation to shoot him dead.

When the story finally lands at that silo in North Dakota, we are treated to spectacular shots of the vault-like interior, dotted by rows of starry lights stretching up into infinity. Of course, Mulder and Scully are hustled away by the Cigarette Smoking Man's soldiers before they get a good look at anything, but that leaves room for a truly alarming ending for Krycek, punctuated by Mark Snow's eerie music. "Apocrypha" is a bit of a let-down from "Piper Maru," neither as exciting (except for Scully's apprehension of the Hispanic Man) nor as moving, but it wraps up neatly the

DAT tape plot thread that began back in "Anasazi," offers Scully some closure for Melissa, and leaves us wondering just what that alien was and what its mission was when it crashed into the sea all those years ago.

"Made you look."
—Mulder to Modell

PUSHER ★★★
2/23/96. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Rob Bowman.

When one Robert Patrick Modell, a.k.a. "Pusher" (Robert Wisden), calls the FBI and claims to be behind the apparent suicides of 14 people, he is promptly arrested—and within minutes there is a terrible traffic accident, leaving one agent dead, another injured, and Modell on the lam. The injured agent, Frank Burst (Vic Polizos), brings in Mulder and Scully to assist in recapturing Modell. Mulder surmises that Modell, an otherwise average man, has acquired a suggestive ability to "push" his victims into belief situations that cause their deaths. Scully is dubious as to Modell's supernatural powers, but when they discover Modell is dying from a brain tumor, they agree that he has decided he has nothing to lose and will take his cat and mouse game to the farthest ends. The game takes a vicious turn when Modell focuses in on Mulder as a "worthy adversary" and lures him and Scully into an ultimate test of wills.

An intense nailbiter, "Pusher" ranks with the best of THE X-FILES. Vince Gilligan's script crackles with witty dialogue and smart characterization that advance the story. For instance, Mulder's taunting of Modell, making him look to see if his shoelaces are untied, unleashes Modell's interest in Mulder and leads directly, two acts later, to the climactic showdown in the hospital between Mulder, Scully, and Modell. That remarkable sequence is foreshadowed beautifully throughout with such scenes as Mulder's extreme concentration at the FBI shooting range and Modell's obsession with the idea of "payback." The hospital scene, wherein Modell impels Mulder, through mental suggestion, into a game of Russian roulette that forces Mulder not only to put a gun to his head (and click on an empty chamber) but train the weapon on an unarmed Scully, is one of the memorable scenes of this show. It consists for the most part of a series of close-ups, and each actor makes the most of it. Mulder's struggle, Scully's courage and fear, and Modell's desire for revenge and death are written in the eyes and on the faces of the characters, so much so that the scene could have been done without even its sparse dialogue.

Vic Polizos's determined Burst is notable for creating a memorable FBI agent not in conflict with Mulder and Scully, and the scene in which he suffers an induced heart attack is a true shocker. Julia Arkos as the computer records technician Holly gives a piquant performance, and the scene

Mulder is forced by psychic suggestion into a game of Russian roulette in "Pusher," a nail-biting episode that ranks among the series' best.



when Modell "pushes" her to beat up Skinner is, quite literally, a kick. Pusher is an egotistical, deluded monster, but Wisden makes you feel a bit sorry for him: if only he had had the social and emotional tools to match his psychic ones, his fate might have been very different.

"More rats, Scully. Don't you think that's significant?"
—Mulder

TESO DOS BICHOS ★
3/8/96. Written by John Shiban. Directed by Kim Manners.

Cliches fasten their claws into this tired yarn about the vengeful jaguar spirit of an Ecuadorian shamaness whose remains have been exported to a Boston museum by a U.S. archaeology team. When team members start disappearing, Mulder theorizes the shamaness is responsible; Scully suspects the influence of a native drug on archaeologist Antonio Bilac (Vic Trevino). Before long, the grade-Z horror flick conventions pop up, with everyone acting like they left their brain at home. This nonsense isn't even fun, because it's all so derivative, and Duchovny and Anderson look bored. The purported climax comes when Mulder and Scully traverse through the maze-like



Having our heroes prowl around in the dark while a monster is on the loose is but one of the cliches on view in "Teso Los Bichos," a lesser episode.

museum basement, where they finally meet the enemy: a flock of kittycats presumably possessed by the jaguar spirit. At this point, one starts wondering when the crew from MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 are going to get into the act. Most excruciating to witness is Scully's tussle with an obviously fake kitty, in reality a dummy covered in rabbit fur. Perhaps writer John Shiban was influenced by CAT PEOPLE producer Val Lewton (namesake of the doomed Dr. Lewton?) but, as Lewton proved, true horror often lies in fear of the unseen. Alas, no such subtleties exist here.

Duchovny and Anderson survive this with straight faces but not much more. The scene in which blood drips from a human intestine deposited in a tree is nicely done; Duchovny, by hurriedly wiping away the drop on his face, creates some real feeling. The distorted images from the shamaness' point of view are evocative. Trevino as the drugged Dr. Bilac delivers a terribly mannered performance, but Janne Mortil as Mona, the unfortunate grad student, is believable. Unfortunately, the serious issues of academic politics and misappropriation of cultural artifacts are only afterthoughts in this script.

Director Kim Manners does his best. The episode's lighting is nearly non-existent; for the first time, it really is too dark, maybe to disguise that fake pussycat. Editor Jim Gross deserves combat pay for cutting such impenetrable footage.

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X-FILES

DARIN MORGAN

THE X-FILES' court jester on turning the show inside-out.

By Paula Vitaris

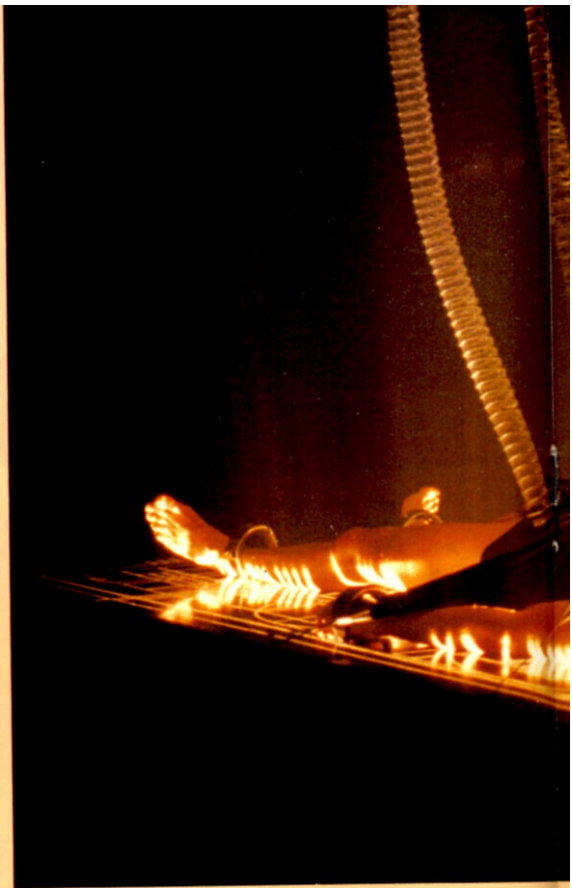
There's a scene in the X-FILES episode "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space'" where in a teenage girl wakes up after a possible alien abduction to find she is wearing her clothes inside out or backwards. "Inside out or backwards" also serves as a fitting description for the comic X-FILES episodes written by Darin Morgan, author of "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space'" and three others: "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose," "The War of the Coprophages," and last season's "Humbug." Morgan's episodes are all bonafide X-files, with cases to be solved and creepy monsters and aliens on the prowl, but like any good court jester, he has no hesitation in sticking a pin into the inflated balloon of X-files convention, be it Mulder's reputation as a well-dressed genius, Scully's ultra-professionalism, or the show's thoroughly serious tone.

The person behind all the hoopla is a self-effacing 30-year-old man with a love for the work of Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, Howard Hawks, Preston Sturges, and Billy Wilder. The younger brother of X-FILES producer-writer Glen Morgan, he was offered two

jobs during the X-FILES' second season: to play the mutant Flukeman in "The Host" and to help work out the story for the "Blood" with Glen and James Wong. Morgan's work on "Blood" earned him a spot on the writing staff, which he accepted even though he was unsure of his ability to turn out a script due to his slowness as a writer and his natural bent towards comedy. When he finally turned in "Humbug," the staff and the network were understandably apprehensive, since the episode was so unlike anything done before. Even though "Humbug," his first produced script, turned out to be massive hit with the fans, to this day he is unsatisfied with the final result, lamenting the loss of a number of good gags.

Morgan got the feeling he was on the wrong show. No matter how much he tried to be serious, he kept turning out funny stuff. "At least on THE X-FILES, there always was a point to why I was being funny. I tie it into the show in various ways," he said. "The thing I was always careful of was to make sure I had a real investigation, with theories from both Mulder and Scully. I was aware I was doing things differently, but I also wanted to make sure I was doing all the things the show would normally do. In

Mulder (Duchovny) eyes a roach motel in "War of Coprophages," Morgan's killer cockroach comedy.



'Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose,' each time Mulder says Clyde is psychic, Scully had a legitimate reason to say he's not. I did even more in 'Coprophages,' where, in the end, Scully was wrong, but she was right in the beginning, and that's what the whole show is about: different theories, how to explain certain phenomenon. My scripts had that, and I always had stereotypical 'boo' scenes or act-outs [ending an act] with a dead body. I was proudest of 'Jose Chung,' in which only two people died, and I didn't have a death on an act-out. You get in the habit of saying, 'Okay, here's a dead body,' cut to commercial. But you usually have to have those. THE X-FILES is a kind of horror show, so you have to have those moments of genuine terror or grossness."

His lingering disappointment with "Humbug" took him in another direction, to a story that would become his second episode, "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose," about a weary middle-aged insurance salesman with the ability to see people's deaths. When Mulder and Scully ask his help to help solve a series of murders of fortune tellers, Clyde, played by Peter Boyle, is reluctant. To his mind, there is no altering the future. "I felt I had done 'Humbug' wrong, so I watched 'Beyond the Sea,' [Morgan's favorite X-FILES episode] again to see what the show is really about. I decided to try to write one that was much more serious and much more depressing. I really was trying to write a show with no jokes in it at all—but I failed."

The character of Clyde Bruckman was named for a comedy writer and director who had committed suicide in 1955. "I was so



Left: Flashback account of an alien abduction from "José Chung's 'From Outer Space.'" Above: Charles Nelson Reilly as author José Chung, who puts together the unreconcilably conflicting stories of various eyewitnesses.

story so much. It's so contrived, that if you think there's a future out there that you can see, you have to as-

sume it was contrived or plotted that way by someone."

Morgan researched fortune tellers and psychics, learning about their tricks to delude the public. Out of that grew a memorably over-the-top character, "a cross between Uri Geller and the Amazing Kreskin," according to Morgan—the Stupendous Yappi, played by Jaap Broeker, David Duchovny's stand-in. "Jaap is such an bizarre character," Morgan said. "He has a very interesting facial structure, and he's mesmerizing. I based Yappi's speech patterns on him. Japp really talks like that, very fast, and sometimes he doesn't stop."

The first act opening scene, when Mulder, Scully and Yappi all show up at the scene of the latest murder, is Morgan's favorite of all his episodes. "Even though it was just a series of one-liners, a lot of information was conveyed. It was all done so fast that it seemed to work. Also, the other cops bought into Yappi's explanation, which separated Mulder and Scully from the other investigators. I like the fact that it was Mulder who was making those points. Even though he believes in psychic phenomenon, he's smart enough to know the difference between a charlatan and a real psychic."

Besides Clyde Bruckman, the episode also demonstrates Morgan's care in delineating Mulder and Scully. "Everyone looks at Mulder as having all

the answers," he said. "Most of the other episodes present him as usually right. I've always found that the things he talks about, if a normal person talked about them, you'd go, 'This guy's crazy.' He's supposed to be a smart guy, but I've never looked at him as such. He's just more lucky in some of his explanations. And Scully, although skeptical, has the right approach, when she says, 'I don't believe this.' Before I wrote for the show, Mulder always seemed like the more interesting character, but once I started writing for it, I found that I liked Scully more."

The result is that Morgan often shakes up Mulder's image, as at the end of "Humbug," with Mulder unwittingly striking a GQ pose. "I don't mind making fun of Mulder," Morgan said. "He's presented as the seeker of the truth, and to me such people are always somewhat ridiculous."

Mulder's and Scully's attitudes toward Clyde also demonstrate Mulder's views of their characters. "My pitch to Chris was that Mulder is so involved in psychic phenomenon, that he's interested in Clyde only for his abilities. But Scully, doesn't believe in these abilities, so she can consider this man as a person and see how, even though he believes he's psychic, it's ruined his life. That was one of the main points of the episode. Everyone considers Mulder to be the one who has all the answers, but I think sometimes he's so narrow-minded that he doesn't do some things properly. He never really considered Clyde Bruckman as a person, only as a phenomenon. The note Clyde leaves for Scully is written to her, because Bruckman knows that she's treating him as a person."

"Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose" contained several lines of dialogue that sent fans into a frenzy pondering their meaning. The first came when Bruckman told Scully she wouldn't die. "Some people took it to mean that Scully was immortal, but the meaning was that Clyde knows how Scully's going to die, but he likes her so much he's not going to tell her, because telling

Peter Boyle guest-starred in "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose."



depressed after 'Humbug' that I felt suicidal," he recalled. "So I said, 'I'm going to write about a character who will commit suicide at the end.' You hear these things about people's careers going downhill, and Clyde Bruckman always struck me as being the ultimate Hollywood horror story. He worked with Keaton, Lloyd, Laurel and Hardy, and W.C. Fields. There was a ten-year span that must have been the greatest. I can't think of a greater series of jobs. Yet the guy obviously had some problems. He was an alcoholic, and ending up killing himself."

Another source of inspiration came from Morgan's insurance salesman father who is, said Morgan, "kind of a depressive guy," like the fictional Clyde. Morgan was also intrigued by the notion of an insurance salesman who can foresee the future. "Insurance is about what will happen to you. You don't know, so you have to take out insurance, and to have a character who actually does know trying to sell people that was kind of amusing."

The episode's exploration of free will versus determinism, and coincidence versus fate, grew out of Morgan's difficulties with plotting. "I've always been really bad with plot and trying to figure out twists," he said. "So Clyde Bruckman and the killer character act in ways that were really easy to plot, but which make the story seem complicated. Stu Charno, who played the killer, asked me, 'Why does the guy kill?' I told him, 'Because I needed him to.' He really doesn't kill for any specific reason. I had come up with this idea of the killer as a puppet, someone who doesn't feel in control of his own life. That's why I like the



Mulder encounters the mysterious Men in Black in "José Chung's 'From Outer Space.'"

her would ruin her life, whether she believed it or not. Telling someone they're not going to die is one of the nicest things you can say. That's why he says it to her. It had nothing to do with whether she was immortal or was going to be hurt in the show."

The other line of dialogue that transfixed fans came when Bruckman says offhandedly, "I'm sure there are worse ways to go, but I can't think of a more undignified one than auto-erotic asphyxiation," and Mulder quickly demands, "Why are you telling me this?" Is it just another joke, or is there some deeper meaning? "Well, yes and no," Morgan hedged. "I think that's what Mulder will die of. A homicide investigation book I read had several pictures of people who died in that manner. There's something in those pictures that is so disturbing, in the sense of going back to the ancient Greeks, and their idea of 'don't dishonor my body after I die.' It's bad enough to be found dead, and a suicide is tragic, but then you see these people who have these really complicated, almost Rube Goldberg type set-ups. It would be humorous if it wasn't so disturbing. This ties in with Clyde's dream about what your body looks like when it dies. How will it be found? In what condition and what manner? That was the gist of that character. The autoerotic asphyxiation is obviously a joke line, but it came about from studying those photos."

Third season post-production for Morgan was a much more pleasant experience than it had been with "Humbug." "On this show, you're really regarded as being a producer of your own episode," Morgan said. "No one trusted me on 'Humbug,' because it was my first. But on 'Clyde Bruckman' and the cockroach episode, it worked out that both David Nutter and Kim Manners had to start prepping another show immediately. They each had one day of cutting and then I was allowed to be in there with the editor."

"Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose" won Morgan praise from an unexpected quarter,

when the science fiction author Harlan Ellison called to express his admiration. Morgan, not a science fiction fan, had no idea who Ellison was. "He was the childhood idol of some of the writers on our staff and they were all pissed off that I didn't even know who he was, and he called me," he laughed. "I've since learned about him, although I've yet to really read his stuff. He really liked the episode and thought Peter Boyle was great."

"The War of the Coprophages," in contrast to the more measured, meditative "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose," was Morgan's lightest, fastest, most farcical episode. "There were some serious, actual ideas in this one, so I felt free to be a little bit lighter," Morgan explained. The episode opens on a weekend with Mulder up in Massachusetts, hanging about UFO hot spots, and Scully at home doing those mundane things everyone does during the weekend. The X-File arrives when Mulder is pulled in by local law enforcement to help solve the mystery behind some strange deaths caused, according to witnesses, by swarms of roaches. Mulder traces the roaches—which he believes, naturally, to be robotic alien probes—to a factory that produces methane from dung.

The episode worked, Morgan feels, but it's another script with which he is unhappy, although he can't put his finger on what bothers him. "I don't know!" he laughed. "I had less time to do that script than any other one. I wrote it in a week. I was a couple of days late with the last act, the only time I was ever late with a script. Fortunately [director] Kim Manners really liked it a lot, even with just the first three acts, so no one was mad at me."

Morgan conceived the idea of alien robot insects from his research into robotics and artificial intelligence. "Everyone assumes that if there are extraterrestrials visiting us, that they would look like gray aliens," he said. "There is this idea that our own future in space exploration is going to be robotic. It would make sense that other alien forms, if they do visit us, would also be robotic. There is a roboticist at M.I.T., Rodney Brooks, who has devised robots in the forms of giant bugs a foot long. They operated much better than other robots, because he had decided that instead of trying to duplicate the way the human brain works, he would make his robots' brains work the way an insect brain works, purely on reflex. The other idea in the episode was how we think our brains are so complicated, the highest level of evolution, and yet so many of our actions and beliefs and thoughts are dictated solely by reflex responses, much like a cockroach's. That was the idea behind the mass hysteria: that people don't think about what's happening. They just hear something and react, and scurry around like insects"

The big "scurry around" scene in "The War of the Coprophages" was a hilariously slapstick mini-riot staged in a convenience store where the indefatigable Scully has stopped to buy a road map. Morgan's source for this scene was the famous 1938 radio adaptation by Orson Welles of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* (the X-FILES episode is set in Millers' Grove, Massachusetts, a tribute to the radio show's Grover's Mills, N.J.), which Morgan considers a fascinating case of mass hysteria. "Nothing like that has ever happened in my lifetime. *War of the Worlds* is an example of people reacting by reflexes rather by complex thoughts. I always wonder what I would have done—you always like to think of yourself as being clearheaded. There are so many inconsistencies in the *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast that if you actu-

Scully (Anderson) is unimpressed by the Stupendous Yappi (Jaap Broeker, Duchovny's stand-in) in "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose."



ally listen to it, it doesn't make any sense. But I'm sure at the time and the moment, I would have been as terrified as anyone."

Mulder and Scully prove to be immune from the panic gripping the town, but they have their own unique ways of reacting. "Although Mulder never reacts to the hysteria, he has his own mindset, so whenever he hears killer cockroaches, he goes, 'Oh my God!' without thinking," Morgan said. "Scully keeps telling him, 'Oh no, it's probably this other thing.' She's always right. But because Mulder has his own way of perceiving things, he keeps trying to convince himself that he's on to something bigger."

Another memorable character makes her appearance halfway through the episode, Bambi Berenbaum (Bobbie Phillips), possibly the most luscious entomologist on the face of the earth. "I thought it would be it amusing if Mulder found another woman partner," Morgan explained. "All of sudden Scully starts going, 'No, this isn't just cockroaches! This is something big! I'm coming up there!' I thought it was amusing, that she would abandon some of her beliefs in order not to lose Mulder to another woman. We received some letters from people who were displeased that Mulder could find Bambi attractive. On the other hand, she is a very intelligent woman, so I don't see why people got mad at that, but just the idea of Mulder having an interest in someone other than Scully put people into shock. You kind of forget Mulder is a man, because he's so interested in the paranormal. But he's a man, nevertheless, and I thought it would be interesting to have him be attracted to a woman."

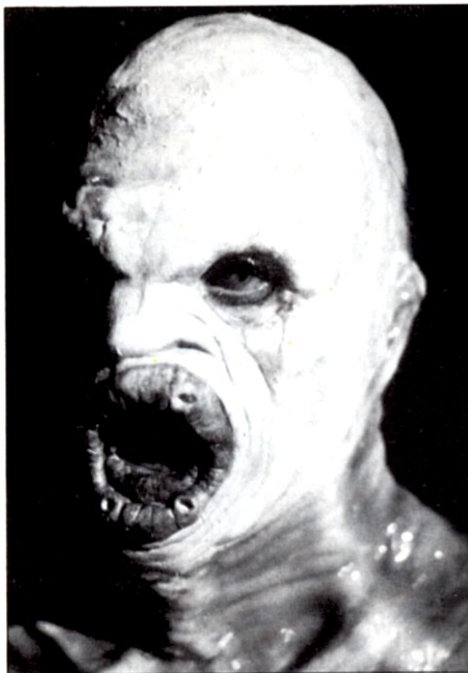
Morgan's final verdict on "The War of Coprophages" is resigned: "It's never boring. It moves really fast. And there's a certain achievement in centering an episode around cockroaches and dung."

Morgan's last effort for THE X-FILES was "José Chung's 'From Outer Space,'" an episode rooted in the show's most basic premises, going all the way back to the pilot and "Deep Throat": the government and the military are covering up proof of alien existence and while they're at it, they're deleting and altering your memories of whatever you think you witnessed. It's also the show's most baroque, flamboyant hour, as Scully relates to a cheerfully cynical writer named José Chung the events of a most unusual alien abduction case involving—possibly—the government abduction and hypnotizing of innocent citizens.

When Morgan joined the X-FILES, he knew very little about alien abduction or UFO lore, so he bought some books on the subject. "There was actually a lot more information about typical alien abduction in 'José Chung' than there has been in most X-FILES," Morgan commented. "Usually the episodes that deal with abductions are about the Cigarette Smoking Man and the conspiracy. That has nothing to do with

“I was aware I was doing things differently, but I also wanted to make sure I was doing all the things the show would normally do.”

—Writer Darin Morgan—



Darin Morgan made his X-FILES debut last season as an actor, playing the Flukeman in "The Host."

standard abduction stories. I thought there's so much more out there about extraterrestrials, and these things should be mentioned. Even Roky, the character who goes to inner earth, is another aspect of that, because UFO people think there are inner earth people. And the published accounts of Men in Black are actually more ridiculous than what I had in the episode."

Director Rob Bowman had to read the script 15 times before he understood it, Morgan said, grateful that the director gave it the extra attention. Although Morgan was interested in exploring the nature of reality in "José Chung," the convoluted narrative design is also his strategy to maneuver around the problems he has with plotting. "There's always a practical reason behind the deeper thoughts," he observed. "It's often a search to find a way to ease out of having to explain your plot. The coincidences in 'Clyde Bruckman' and the weird things about aliens and government involvement in 'José Chung' had to do with my needing an out. That out was the hypnosis angle. I felt like I could do anything. Unlike saying it's all a dream, I could always go, 'It's all just memory implanta-

tion.' Even though the episode is all about aliens and the government conspiracy, it actually has more to do with hypnosis and how much we can actually know and remember. I always thought it was more interesting to have some of your memories changed than to have them completely wiped out, so this show was more along those lines. 'They' have the ability to change what you remember. To me, that's more terrifying than being abducted by aliens. It's kind of confusing to talk about, I know, but all this stuff was invented to avoid a specific plot. In terms of the multiple storytelling, I wanted to do something like RASHOMON, where everyone had a different memory. I originally wanted to do it with José Chung interviewing a different person for each act. That still happens in the third act, when Chung talks to Blaine. But it was too complicated, so I stuck with Scully. But I find it appealing to use 'tales within tales,' where someone is telling a story and then a person in that story starts telling another story. The whole episode is really that, because even when Scully is telling her story, she's actually telling everyone else's account."

Lord Kinbote, the hulking red creature who abducts Chrissy, Harold, and the two Air Force pilots, is a double tribute to stop-animation genius Ray Harryhausen and to Morgan's favorite writer, Vladimir Nabokov. "We didn't have the time or money to do a proper stop-action model," lamented Morgan. "Toby Lindala [special effects makeup supervisor] built a suit. The scene was shot, speeded up and then slowed down by computer to give it a jerkiness. Mat Beck [visual effects supervisor] had to do a lot of work on it. I hope it looked like stop-animation." The name Kinbote is taken from Charles Kinbote, the possibly mad scholar of Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*. "In one of his interviews, Nabokov made the point that reality is a word that should always have quotes around it, because everyone's reality in a sense is different," Morgan said. "People will look differently at the same object, depending on their backgrounds and past history. That was a direct influence on this episode."

Morgan could not resist adding his own satire of Fox's alien autopsy show, the X-FILES' second re-creation of the program this season. "We were all watching the alien autopsy tape one day, and it was so ridiculous," Morgan recalled. "The Big-foot footage at the end of 'José Chung' is just so damn phony, but you have no idea how much it costs to get the rights to that thing. You think about how much money has been made on that footage, and it's a crime! And I feel the same way about the alien autopsy: it's a swindle, and it's almost disturbing to see how many people take it seriously." Morgan expressed his sentiments by having his alien autopsy

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X-FILES

THE CIGARETTE SMOKING MAN

It's been an interesting year, says actor William Davis.

It's been quite an interesting year for the Cigarette Smoking Man, admits his real-life counterpart, actor William B. Davis. First glimpsed in the series pilot as a shadowy cigarette-puffing figure who, in the final scene, hid away the only remaining evidence of alien visitation gathered by Mulder and Scully, he has developed into a complex character with ties to the Mulder family that reach back four decades. With the present-day unfolding of the conspiracy to an international level, the Smoking Man is no longer the remote figure he used to be. Now he reports to a New York-based syndicate comprised of men from all over the world, possibly attached to the United Nations.

Davis confessed that he was surprised to find out the Smoking Man had to answer to others. "In the early days when I had much less information, I was conjecturing all sorts of close relationships with the President or whatever," he said with a laugh. But when he read the script, "I wasn't too impressed with the authority they seem to have over me. I think the first episode I had with them, I gave into them a bit, so I stood up to them a little more [in 'Apocrypha']. I don't know what's in Chris Carter's mind, whether [working for the syndicate] is my main function or whether I'm a double agent in that I do whatever it is for the U.S. government as well. But I'm having fun playing with it."

Davis has no trouble playing a character whose intentions he can't always fathom, adjusting with each new piece of the puzzle. "Every once in a while I get a script, and I go, 'Oh!' and then I have to shift my story. For instance, prior to the first episode with the syndicate, I was quite confident that I was saving the world from impetuous young people like Mulder, who were out to discover some things that are going to scare the pants off everybody and cause chaos. So I had a very definite role to play." When the Smoking Man found himself in trouble with the Syndicate at the beginning of the third season because of a missing DAT tape, Davis, who had always felt that his character considered himself something of a hero, had to figure out a way to justify his self-serving moves. "It wasn't quite so morally upstanding as 'saving the world.' What seems to me to have happened is that Bill Mulder and I, at an early age, took different forks in the road. We



Mulder confronts the Cigarette Smoking Man (William Davis) in "Talitha Cumi."

either go with this, as I did, or go as Bill Mulder did. He kept resisting it, wanting to find some human value—and he ended up drinking himself practically to death until we had to finish it off. But I keep adapting to new information and building it up. When I go to the X-FILES conventions I sometimes make the case that I'm the real hero of the show and Mulder is the villain. It's going to be hard to sell that case to the fans now!"

Davis had never met John Neville (THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN), the eminent theater actor and director, cast as the Syndicate's figure of authority, the "Well-Manicured Man." He had been aware of Neville's work since the early 1960s, when Davis was in England and Neville was running the Nottingham Repertory Theater. It was fascinating to meet Neville, who, in turn, had known of Davis' work. "I've really enjoyed making a personal contact and talking about lots of things that we're both interested in, in terms of Shakespearean production and British theater," Davis explained. "John is great to work with. He's a very powerful actor; he makes me work. Because he's as strong as he is, the Smoking Man's vulnerability has to be covered up."

When Davis read the script that introduced the Well-Manicured Man, his first reaction was, "I thought I was well-manicured! So how is he differentiated from me? But once I saw John Neville doing it, then you could see the differentiation very clearly, because he's quite a different presence than I am." Davis is sure the Smoking Man would like to see the Well-Manicured Man disappear permanently, noting that the Well-Manicured Man has arranged his own

meetings with Mulder and Scully. "Within this sphere the Well-Manicured Man has a level of authority," he said. "I'm not quite sure why he has it, but he has it. But at the same time he seems to be rebelling against us, bit by bit, drop by drop. I think he's probably dangerous. We may have to finish him off!" he said with a laugh. "I'm having a lot of trouble getting good help, as you may have noticed. I mean, I hired this Hispanic Man, Luis Cardenal [played by Lenny Britos], because he's known for his marksmanship, right? But he has Skinner at point-blank range and he can't knock him off either!"

The Smoking Man's attempt to have Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) assassinated in "Piper Maru" was one of several efforts this year to derail the FBI assistant director. "Skinner's getting dangerously liberal. He used to be a little more on my side of the fence, I thought; now he's slipping across. The Smoking Man doesn't react well. It's dangerous to all the people of this country." Davis's favorite "Paper Clip" scene occurs when the Smoking Man furiously demands the DAT tape and Skinner says he "may" have located it. "It was a very well-written scene," Davis said, noting that he has added it to his demo reel. "I had a lot of shifts. It wasn't just bang-bang-bang, but involved some tactics."

The teaser to "Apocrypha," a fascinating flashback to 1953 and the events that triggered Mulder's and Scully's current-day investigations, showed the youthful Smoking Man, Bill Mulder and an unknown third man questioning the last living victim of a submarine disaster. By the end, the Smoking Man had set to rights everything in his part of the world; he had recovered the missing tape and imprisoned the treacherous Krycek alive in an abandoned missile silo. The Smoking Man promptly disappeared once more for several months, until he resurfaced in "Avatar" and "Talitha Cumi."

It's hard even for the actors not to get caught up in the show, and Davis confessed that he tries not to miss an episode. "I watch it because I like it, but I also watch it because my character's a lot more active than one might think. There's a lot of things that happen on those episodes that I did! I may not be in the episode, and I don't get any credit or money, but somebody destroyed that evidence, or did something or moved something, or had something done, or sent some people in, and it's usually me! I like to keep track of these things." **Paula Vitaris**

“One way the show has distinguished itself is with our wide palette. We have a big range, so the audience doesn’t know what it’s going to get.”

—Co-producer Howard Gordon—

can’t have them dealing with these complex emotional issues as a thread each week. In fact, I think people would hate the show if it were like that.”

This has been an important season for the development of Scully. No longer just the junior agent assigned to babysit/spy on “Spooky” Mulder, she has become an essential character in her own right. With her abduction and the death of her sister, she now has a personal stake in uncovering the various conspiracies engineered by the Cigarette Smoking Man and his cohorts. But Scully has also had a major role to play in non-mythology episodes, especially “Revelations,” which brought Scully to an emotional turning point and provided a showcase for actress Gillian Anderson. Late in the season came “Wetwired,” which thrust Scully onto the brink of a breakdown, thanks to some insidious tampering with television signals. “I’ve always seen Scully as Mulder’s co-equal,” Carter said. “What happens is that, because in the real world the FBI is 91% male, Scully has to constantly be showing this boy’s club that she is, in fact, up to the task. I think it’s interesting that she doesn’t take a back seat, and people would take issue with it if she were to let Mulder do all of that kind of posturing. It’s interesting to me to play her that way, and Gillian plays it very well.”

One element about which Carter is adamant is that there will be no romance between Mulder and Scully. But what he viewed as the third season continuation of their working relationship and friendship, some fans viewed as coldness, even the beginning of a professional split. Carter said he had no idea why the audience would perceive such a development. In “Paper Clip,” Mulder and Scully “were very close,” said Carter. “That episode reunited them in a way, in a common bond. The two-part episode, ‘Nisei’ and ‘731,’ brought them together towards a common goal. I think what some people want is an escalation of their relationship. I’m not prepared to do that right now, but I don’t think I’m giving them any less. Their case may be that there hasn’t been a scene, like in ‘Tooms’ where they sit in the car together and have a moment where they smile and are light, but that’s just because of the kind of stories we’ve told.”

X-FILES

THE LIST

Creator Chris Carter on his second session time in the director’s chair.

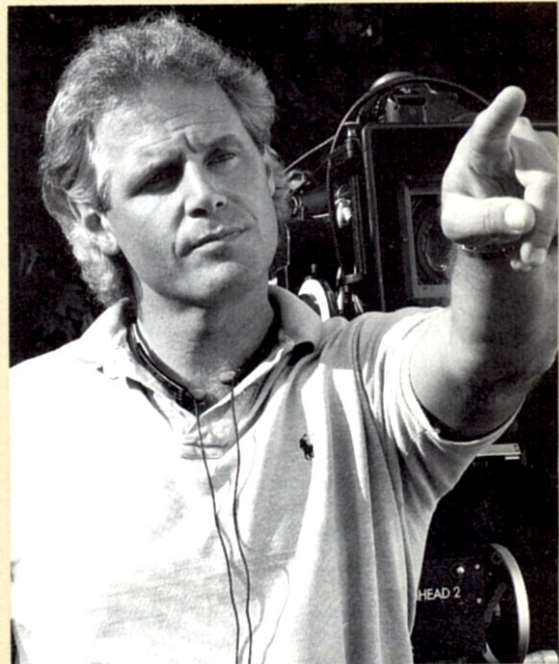
Duane Barry,” one of the best episodes of THE X-FILES’ second season, was the directing debut of creator and executive producer, Chris Carter, who felt the time had come to try to translate the images in his head directly to the screen without having to sift them through a second person’s vision. Happy with the result, Carter decided to direct again in the third season with “The List.”

Set in and around a Florida penitentiary, “The List” is, according to Carter, a “nice little tale of revenge with a nice twisty end,” about the spirit of an executed prisoner, Neech Manley (Badja Djola) who returns from beyond the grave to wreak havoc on the people who had harmed him in life. The script’s origin lay in a book Carter had been reading on the subject of death row; he was intrigued to find that a belief in reincarnation is popular with the inmates. “We put people to death, but we keep them imprisoned for a long time,” Carter said. “They are subjected to other punishments, maybe some worse than death—indignities and cruelties and torture—and I think that if a person’s punishment is ultimately death, if he were to get some revenge for the other things that had happened to him, it would be an interesting story. That was my original idea, and I thought death row was an interesting place to set it.”

Carter admitted that another reason to set “The List” in a prison was due to his status as a second-time director. “I’ve never shot a giant location, and I’ve never shot a big dinner table scene. There are things that are frightening to me as a director. In episodic television you have very little time to get a whole lot of work done, and I didn’t want to put myself out on a limb with something like ‘Paper Clip.’ I’m so glad Rob Bowman did that episode and not me. ‘The List’ seemed more like a contained episode.”

Although many of the death row inmates (as well as a number of guards), were cast with African-American actors, Carter was not attempting to make a statement about unequal sentencing in the U.S. justice system. “I didn’t want to deal with the issue of black justice versus white justice. It was uninteresting to me, ultimately, because it’s kind of obvious in this country.”

“The List” is one of the season’s most graphic episodes. Neech’s spirit presence is signaled by swarms of maggots; a prison guard is decapitated, and there is a brief, out of focus shot of his bloody, headless neck. “Maggots are a part of life; everybody’s seen them,” Carter commented. “Everybody has this big reaction to the grossness



After his impressive directorial debut with “Duane Barry,” Chris Carter returned to the director’s chair with less impressive results in “The List.”

of the maggots, as if we had maggots going into people’s eyeballs or something.” He went “back and forth” with the network on all the episode’s visual aspects before shooting. “I told them what I wanted, and they told me what they didn’t want. I wanted to put the head in the paint can; I wanted to do the headless man; I wanted to do the guy rotting in the attic. To be honest, I like to show very little. The things I do show, I like to show for just an instant, or I want to show them in an obscure angle or in a blurry shot, or pass right by them. What you think you saw, or what you glimpsed, or what you didn’t see is scarier than what you put right in front of people.

“I wanted the episode to feel claustrophobic,” added Carter, who used sound to accentuate the atmosphere of confinement and suffocation. “I had them put in almost an underwater rumble. I wanted almost a submarine quality.”

That submarine quality is also reflected in the strange green cast of the lighting. “I wanted to do a green episode,” he noted. “We don’t use green normally. A lot of directors always shoot prisons blue. Blue is not a queasy color. It makes prisons beautiful, in a way. And I didn’t want to make this beautiful at all. I wanted to make it a little nauseating.” **Paula Vitaris**

X-FILES

D.P.O.

Co-executive producer Gordon on scripting his underrated effort.

What's harder than writing THE X-FILES' intricately plotted mythology episodes? Writing the episode that comes afterward. It's nearly impossible to top the electrifying events from the week before

That was the situation faced by co-executive producer Howard Gordon when he was asked to write the episode following the powerhouse trilogy of "Anasazi," "The Blessing Way," and "Paper Clip." Gordon's story, "D.P.O.," focused on an Oklahoma teenager with the power to control lightning. To fans still not decompressed from the three-parter, "D.P.O." was something of an anti-climax. But if you consider "D.P.O." strictly as a stand-alone story, it turns out to be an affecting X-FILES episode with fine performances and a dark comic energy all its own stemming from the unrequited loves and hopeless longings of clueless teen Darren Peter Oswald, played by Giovanni Ribisi.

The staff had wanted to do a story about a kid who could conduct lightning or electricity, but uncertainty about how to handle the premise delayed turning it into a script. Gordon explained the writers wanted to avoid the image the term "Lightning Boy" kindled "of a guy with lightning bolts coming out of his fingertips. I finally figured it out. My take had lightning as a metaphor for adolescent hormones. The lightning represented that unbridled part of all of us. Darren could control it—but not really. He could harness it and tap into it, and occasionally redirect it. But even it overwhelmed him in the end." To this basic premise, Gordon added the background of a town where lightning struck frequently, thanks to the research conducted by the nearby Astadourian Lightning Observatory (named after THE X-FILES' chief researcher Mary Astadourian). Gordon said he liked the idea that in a town where lightning struck so often, there "existed a boy who is basically Beavis or Butthead, but with this ability. And that was the genesis of the idea."

If you have Beavis, you must have Butthead—or, in this case, Darren's slightly more self-aware friend Zero, played by Jack Black (DEAD MAN WALKING). Darren and Zero, said Gordon, were "two complete losers who just didn't know any better, with one of them suddenly bestowed with this ability. What would happen?" This question inspired Gordon to give Darren an obsessive, secret infatuation with his remedial reading teacher, Mrs. Kiviat.



Howard Gordon's duties as co-exec producer left little time for writing this season, but he did deliver "D.P.O.," an underrated stand-alone episode.

"I thought, well, maybe he's got a crush on his teacher at school," said Gordon. "One thing led to the next. It's a very thin story when you look at it. It's just this pining adolescent."

Teenagers, not surprisingly, took Gordon's message to heart. The mail he received in response to "D.P.O." let him know that "most of the people who loved this episode or really dug it were kids. It's one of the favorites of that segment of our audience. There were other people who felt let-down by it and disinterested by it, but I got a lot of letters from teachers who said, 'I have students like that.' I was pretty proud of the fact that there was some kind of accuracy in the character."

Despite the focus on the guest characters, Mulder and Scully are not exactly invisible in "D.P.O." One notable scene involved Scully's questioning of an openly hostile sheriff, while Mulder silently stands by. His refusal to get involved was deliberate, according to Gordon. "The idea was a way to describe Scully's progress as a skeptic, to put her in that position. It was one way of re-examining where she's been and to actually have, for a change, someone in the form of the sheriff verbalize and vocalize some of the arguments she probably would have put forth a year and a half, two years ago. How would she answer herself in this context?"

Paula Vitaris

"I just try to come up with good stories and make the best show I possibly can. So far, I'm very proud of the work that's been done."

—Producer Chris Carter—

As the fourth season approaches, THE X-FILES stands at a crossroads. Jeff Vlaming, Kim Newton, and Darin Morgan have left. Director of photography John Bartley, whose contribution to the show's visual style has been invaluable, has departed. Replacing him is Ron Stannet, whose credits include LONESOME DOVE, for which he won a Canadian Society of Cinematographer's award. And Chris Carter will now be dividing his time between THE X-FILES and MILLENNIUM. The pilot episode was shot this past spring, resulting in Carter's protracted absence from THE X-FILES. How Carter the perfectionist will maintain quality control on two shows, given the schedule of THE X-FILES alone, remains to be seen, but perhaps changes will not be obvious, especially with the return of Glen Morgan and James Wong to the staff after the cancellation of their SPACE: ABOVE AND BEYOND. Morgan and Wong are slated to work on five to eight episodes and contribute episodes to MILLENNIUM.

The other critical change is a new time slot. Fox will be moving THE X-FILES from Friday at 9:00 p.m. to Sunday at 9:00 p.m. after its first three episodes next season which debuts October. (After that MILLENNIUM will slip into the Friday timeslot.) THE X-FILES has become "appointment TV," but it has probably acquired as big an audience as it ever will draw on Friday, the least-watched night of the week. Sunday is the night with the most viewers and Fox is gambling that X-FILES will not only bring an established audience but also attract new people who might never have watched, otherwise.

But will that established X-FILES audience change its regular Friday night date after three years? There are a number of factors that may disrupt Fox's plan, including the network's own lackluster Sunday lead-in schedule. And there is the show's own convoluted internal mythology. A new viewer tuning in on Sunday won't know what is happening without at least a helpful rerun of "More Secrets of the X-Files," the series recap that Fox aired last May. The perfect solution, of course, would be for Fox to gain access to the 10:00 p.m. time slot from the FCC and schedule MILLENNIUM right after THE X-FILES. Now that would be a perfect Freaky Friday double bill. □

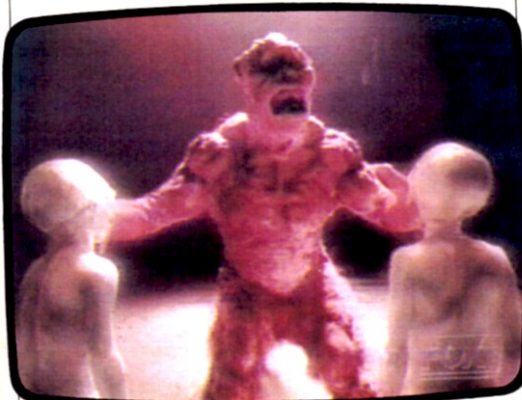
"What good is an interpreter when everyone speaks the language of silence?"
—Detective Glen Chao

HELL MONEY

3/29/96. Written by Jeff Vlaming. Directed by Tucker Gates.

Newly arrived immigrants in San Francisco's Chinese community play a deadly game: they gamble body parts, corneas and kidneys and even hearts, against a chance to win an enormous lottery prize. Mulder and Scully come into the case when a young man is found cremated, a murder that fit the profile of a serial murder case Mulder has been tracking. They team up with Detective Glen Chao (B.D. Wong), a young American detective of Chinese ancestry. Autopsy results, clues, and witness statements lead them, eventually, to Dr. Chin (James Hong), the recipient of the black market organs. An arrogant chain-smoker, he's a Chinese version of the Cigarette Smoking Man.

The story, about the exploitation of the weak by the strong, is a recurring X-FILES theme, but as treated here it would fit nicely into any other police drama. Mulder's initial speculation that Chinese ghosts are to blame is feeble, and even he abandons this theory by mid-episode. The ghost theme then mutates into a symbolic mode, with the notion that the immigrants are haunted by the ghosts of their ancestors, but it's a desperate grab to retain a paranormal aspect. The three actors in the black suits and ghost masks are not very convincing.



The alien Lord Kinbote in "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space,'" writer Darin Morgan's tribute to Ray Harryhausen and Vladimir Nabokov.

The pacing, with much repetition of nearly identical scenes, is glacial. There are nice performances from Michael Yama as a father desperate for money to cure his daughter's leukemia, and from Lucy Alexis Liu as the gentle daughter. And it's wonderful to see a performer of the caliber of Tony-winner B.D. Wong on THE X-FILES. Although not deeply developed in the script, his youthful but jaded detective, caught between two cultures, is altogether appealing.

Despite the failings of the script, the visuals, with their vibrant red tones, are a pleasure, and the lottery scenes are well staged. Best of all, Scully makes such a horribly, wonderfully corny joke about the victim who left his heart in San Francisco that even the dour Mulder cracks a grin.

"Ever see a UFO in these parts? Ever experienced a period of missing time? You ever have the suspicion that you've been abducted by aliens? Have you ever found a metal implant in your body? You checked everywhere?"
—Mulder to Ovaltine Diner cook

JOSE CHUNG'S "FROM OUTER SPACE"

4/12/96. Written by Darin Morgan. Directed by Rob Bowman.

José Chung (Charles Nelson Reilly) is a writer whose publisher thinks there are big bucks to be



The plot of "Hell Money" is about a lottery in which Chinese immigrants gamble their organs in exchange for a chance of a huge cash prize.

made off the UFO abduction phenomenon. The puzzling abduction case of Chrissy Georgio and Harold Lamb, teenagers from Klass County, Washington, proves a suitable subject, and included on Chung's interview list are the two FBI agents who investigated the case. Mulder, fearing ridicule, refuses, but Scully accepts, and as she tells the tale, we are treated to a dazzling display of unreliable narrative piled upon unreliable narrative—flashbacks of flashbacks. To make matters worse, each person not only has an agenda to promote, which may color his or her testimony, but they all—including Scully and Mulder—may have been hypnotized into believing something else happened to them than what really happened. Which means, of course, that it is completely impossible to arrive at any consensus as to the truth.

Even so, the script is so deftly written that each scene, contradictory though it may be to what came before, advances the plot. The baseline story seems to be that the Air Force costumes its pilots to look like alien Grays, sends them out in experimental aircraft to render citizens unconscious and bring them to a secret facility, where they are hypnotized into believing they've been abducted by aliens. The tables are turned on two of the pilots, in the process of kidnapping Chrissy and Harold, when a creature right out of a Ray Harryhausen movie kidnaps them, along with Chrissy and Harold, and brings them all back to his ship for experimentation. Also on Chung's interview list are science fiction fan Blaine, who lives in the hope of being abducted, and Roky, the lineman (CLOSE ENCOUNTERS reference) who witnessed the abduction and has written up his account in screenplay format. And then there are two mysterious Men in Black...

This is a very funny episode—self-referential and in-jokey, loaded with verbal and visual allusions to UFO and popular culture, especially sci-fi and horror films, although there are other more obscure references: Harold Lamb is the name of the character played by Harold Lloyd in the silent comedy THE FRESHMAN. But this is also the ultimate expression of Morgan's—and THE X-FILES'—continuing fascination with the nature of truth, and the truth of one's memories. In a way, this episode is a sequel to first season's "Deep Throat," which saw Mulder captured by the Air Force and drugged into losing the memory of the experimental aircraft he witnessed. For all its humor, "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space'" is a deeply pessimistic episode. If you can't trust yourself, and you can't trust others, how can you form any kind of relationship? No wonder Chung's final thoughts concern human loneliness, rather than a pronouncement on truth and reality.

Director Rob Bowman shows off a deft hand at directing comedy. Duchovny and Anderson are simply priceless at sending themselves up, but even in the midst of insanity they bring poignancy to their characters. And Charles Nelson Reilly is divine; what delightful and unexpected casting.

"I was no choir boy. I inhaled." —Skinner

AVATAR

4/26/96. Teleplay by Howard Gordon. Story by David Duchovny & Howard Gordon. Directed by James Charleston.

Nearly two years after his first appearance in "Tooms," Mitch Pileggi's Assistant Director Walter Skinner takes center stage. Unfortunately, it's a creaky vehicle—the stern, by-the-book boss accused of a terrible crime. Skinner, on the verge of an unwanted divorce, finds solace in the arms of a woman he meets in a bar. He wakes the next morning to find her murdered. Of course, the D.C. police consider him the prime suspect, and the FBI internal affairs people start poking around for a reason to get rid of him. But Mulder is convinced that Skinner has been framed, and works tirelessly to clear him. A more dubious Scully, wondering why the normally forceful Skinner doesn't defend himself, also searches for proof of his innocence. Add in Skinner's estranged wife Sharon (Jennifer Hetrick), Skinner's sleep disorders, the old woman who haunts him since his near-death experience in Vietnam, and the return of the conspiracy, in the form of the Cigarette Smoking Man and the Gray-Faced Man from "Piper Maru"—and you get a top-heavy story. All the elements come together, more or less, but you can see the stitching.

The scenes between Skinner and Sharon are contrived. His bedside confession, where many words say nothing we haven't already gathered, is simply poor writing. Skinner's decision to embrace all his fears, personified in the merged figure of the Old Woman and his critically-injured wife, should be affecting since it finally releases him from his mental paralysis. But his decision is also used as a plot device to get him to the hotel, and the action moves so quickly that it rips all the emotion from the scene. The timing of his movements is off, too. How does he get from the hospital to the hotel room and shoot the bad guy before Mulder, who's in the lobby, reaches the same spot?

Jennifer Hetrick gives a thoughtful performance as Sharon, and Pileggi does his best, but there's little chemistry between them. The shot revealing the Cigarette Smoking Man is too obvious, but a similar one when the camera shifts focus to reveal the Gray-Faced Man spying on Mulder, Scully and Judy Fairly (Stacy Grant) is a true bone-chiller. Bringing back the Gray-Faced Man is a wonderfully unexpected twist.

"Avatar" seems to be the battle for Skinner's soul between good, as personified by female characters, and bad, personified by male characters (except for Mulder, who embodies many qualities traditionally regarded as feminine). Skinner, in the end, chooses to remain somewhere in the middle. Perhaps it's no coincidence, then, that the person whose woe strikes deepest is Mulder, who begs for Skinner to confide in him, but is rebuffed with a cool thank-you. Duchovny is truly moving in this scene.

"Avatar" expanded the character of assistant director Skinner (Mitch Pileggi), but the poorly written episode proved to be unsatisfactory.





The lake monster makes its jokey last-shot appearance in "Quagmire," after Mulder and Scully have given up and left the scene.

"We eat fish and fish eat us."

—Scully

QUAGMIRE

★★★

5/10/96. Written by Kim Newton. Directed by Kim Manners.

Part JAWS, part THE LOST WORLD, and part Buster Keaton, "Quagmire" finally brings a Loch Ness monster story to THE X-FILES. Mulder drags Scully and her little dog Queequeg to investigate sightings in north Georgia of the lake leviathan "Big Blue." Dr. Farraday, a die-hard skeptic, scoffs at the story, but when bodies (or in one case, half a body) start floating to the surface, it becomes apparent that something is turning the local population into lunch meat.

"Quagmire" is a fairly simple story. What makes it memorable is the sheer swampiness of the location (aided by John Bartley's misty blue cinematography); Anderson's perfectly played bereavement over the serio-comic loss of poor little Queequeg to the jaws of whatever is out there; and a colorful cast of characters, including two brain-dead teens from "The War of the Coprophages" still in search of a great high. But it's in the third act that "Quagmire" becomes truly special, when Mulder and Scully are forced to abandon ship and take refuge on a big rock in the middle of a pitch-black night. The stranded Mulder and Scully, unable to get away from each other, finally have that heart-to-heart they've so carefully eluded for three years. Touching, insightful, imaginative, funny, and beautifully acted, it's a major piece of character writing, with Scully analyzing Mulder's Ahab-like tendencies and Mulder resisting her interpretation. This is a unique scene, one of the best of the entire series. Then, in a variation on a gag from Keaton's wonderful 1921 short "The Boat," they realize, when Dr. Farraday comes wading by, that all this time they've been just a few feet from shore.

There is one major misstep: the final shot of Big Blue slipping through the lake waters, after Mulder and Scully have walked away. This shot destroys the story's ambiguity. A large ripple in the water would have been much more clever.

MORE SECRETS OF THE X-FILES

5/10/96. Produced by Bart Montgomery. Narrated by Mitch Pileggi.

No secrets here (but then, the fact that the title misleads us is rather X-FILES-ish). MORE SECRETS OF THE X-FILES is a follow-up to last year's SECRETS OF THE X-FILES. Despite brief appearances by Chris Carter, David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson, and narration by Mitch Pileggi, this is basically a Fox edit job recapping the series' complex conspiracy storyline through the use of episode clips. The charitable interpretation is that the network wants to help new fans catch up. Of course, it doesn't hurt to have a program with the name X-FILES airing during May sweeps.

"Bet all you guys were officers in the audio-visual club in high school, huh?"
—Mulder to the Lone Gunmen

WETWIRED

★★★

5/10/96. Written by Mat Beck. Directed by Rob Bowman.

Reminiscent of second season's "Blood," "Wetwired" is another chapter in the conspiracy story, laced with heavy doses of angst and paranoia for Mulder and Scully. When several people with heavy television viewing habits kill friends and loved ones for no explainable reason, Mulder and Scully suspect the influence of a signal coming through the cable wire, especially after Mulder finds a strange device in the switch box near the home of one of the accused. They review the dozens of tapes made by the murderers, and soon Scully falls victim to an imperceptible signal that causes people's most secret fears to flare up into paranoia and delusions. Scully's fear is betrayal by Mulder into the hands of the conspiracy, and before long, she shoots at him and takes off into the night.

Though the evil television concept may not be too original, it gives Mulder and Scully a chance to debate the merits of the medium broadcasting them to millions of homes. The concept also serve as a catalyst for characterization. It's certainly interesting to learn that Scully's biggest fear is betrayal by Mulder, and sickly fascinating to watch her fall apart. Anderson is superb, especially in the scene when Mulder finds her at her mother's house and she nearly kills him before collapsing in tears.

The script loses steam when Scully's collapse, which logically should be the climax of the episode, takes place at the end of the third act. Act Four turns into Mulder's story, as he hunts down the men responsible for the sinister project. Gripping though it may be, it's anti-climatic, despite a tense confrontation between Mulder and X (Steven Williams). An astonishing twist right at the end injects just the needed dash of excitement. Duchovny is excellent, especially in the scene where Mulder has to identify a body he fears may be Scully's.

"You can smoke that? Or you want to smoke on this?"

—Mulder, pressing his gun in the Cigarette Smoking Man's face

TALITHA CUMI

★★★1/2

5/17/96. Teleplay by Chris Carter. Story by David Duchovny & Chris Carter. Directed by R.W. Goodwin.

"Talitha Cumi" is a sequel to last season's two-parter, "Colony" and "End Game." This time, two shapeshifters are on the scene. One is last season's Pilot (Brian Thompson), who is trying to find Jeremiah Smith (THE INVADERS' Roy Thinnes), a shapeshifter who has turned, we learn, against the colonization project. We first meet

Scully helps to uncover a secret about Mulder's past in "Talitha Cumi," putting herself back in danger with the government conspiracy.



Smith when he miraculously heals victims of an Arlington, Virginia, fast-food restaurant shooting. Mulder and Scully arrive and are puzzled by a detective's report that Smith somehow vanished without anyone seeing him leave. Mulder becomes desperate to find him when his mother, after a meeting with the Cigarette Smoking Man at the Mulder family's unused Rhode Island summer house, suffers a massive stroke.

Deliberately paced, "Talitha Cumi" is not as viscerally exciting as last season's finale, "Anasazi." The so-called cliffhanger, with Mulder, Scully, and Jeremiah Smith watching the approaching Pilot, is weak. The big action scene, a fight between Mulder and X, goes on too long. Yet "Talitha Cumi" is a most unusual and fascinating hour of television. Cerebral, cool, and dense, the real struggles are those of opposing wills, not opposing bodies. In the center ring are the Cigarette Smoking Man and his prisoner, Jeremiah Smith. Their debates on good and evil, adapted, as literary Internet fans have noted, from the "Grand Inquisitor" chapter of Dostoevsky's THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV, place further into the light the Cigarette Smoking Man's basic motivations, revealing how truly cynical and power-hungry he is. When Jeremiah shapeshifts into the figures of men the Cigarette Smoking Man has destroyed—Deep Throat and Bill Mulder—we grin in satisfaction as we see the first glimmers of fear on the Cigarette Smoking Man's smug face.



"Wetwired" featured a conspiracy involving television sets wired to send subliminal signals that cause viewers to commit murder.

These are not the only memorable scenes. The sequence in which Mulder weeps at his mother's bedside, then loses control and blindly attacks the unwaveringly arrogant Cigarette Smoking Man, is sublimely acted by both Duchovny and William B. Davis. Earlier, Mulder follows a clue from his mother, rooting through the summer house and all the things that represent a happier, vanished life. This emotional scene takes three minutes, and is all the stronger for containing no word of dialogue.

The scariest moment, however, comes in the meeting between Mrs. Mulder and the Cigarette Smoking Man, when his reminder that he was better at other things than her husband Bill suggests a past relationship between the two. Waiting to find out what really occurred between them long ago is a better cliffhanger than the upcoming stiletto fight.

Although this episode is not focused on Scully, her presence is vital, both as a supporter for Mulder and pursuer of clues. Rebecca Toolan, as Mrs. Mulder, finally gets a chance to shine, if briefly. And Roy Thinnes is simply wonderful as the saintly Jeremiah. But is he what he seems to be? Now that THE X-FILES has established the existence of aliens, the uncertainty derives from knowing they can assume any identity, any personality, to accomplish their mysterious goals. Trust no one.

X-FILES

NISEI & 731

Advancing the story of the alien-human experience.

By Paula Vitaris

"Nisei" and "731" form another "mythology" two-parter advancing the story of the government alien-human hybrid experiments begun in "The Erlenmeyer Flask." Like "Paper Clip," which made direct reference to Operation Paperclip, the post-World War II government scheme to bring Nazi scientists to the United States, "Nisei" and "731" draw from a sickening piece of recently uncovered history: the human experiments conducted by the notorious Japanese Army Unit 731 on prisoners during World War II.

These horrors are translated into X-FILES terms when a bootleg videotape of a strange autopsy leads Mulder and Scully to evidence of current experiments on humans under the supervision of the elusive Dr. Takeo Ishimaru (Robert Ito), a former member of Unit 731. This is the same man, Scully remembers, who supervised the experiments performed on her during her second season abduction. "Unit 731 first came to my attention at the same time as it did for a lot of other people, when I read in the New York Times about what the Japanese did to prisoners of war during the Second World War," Chris Carter said. "I've known

for a long time about the tests that the Nazis performed on Jews, and I've been to the Holocaust Museum and Yad Vashem [the Holocaust memorial] in Israel. I studied the Holocaust as a kid, and I had read some time back about the Nazi scientists coming here and getting clemency so we could use their science and technology for our own purposes. That's one of those dirty secrets that America has never come to grips with, and I thought Unit 731 was an interesting way to use it in the show."

"Nisei" and "731" first took shape as a single episode, number seven, assigned to story editor Frank Spotnitz. But Spotnitz' plan to set the story on a moving train soon put the episode into jeopardy. "We found that we were going to have some trouble shooting with trains," Carter said. "So I took said, 'Let's bump it to episode nine, and make it a two-parter.' That way we were able to cut the cost of the trains in half. This is my life and my job, and it may sound easy to people, but it's like juggling chainsaws, trying to keep all these things going forward. We found that shooting on trains is very difficult to do on a television schedule, as well as on a television budget."

"The Blessing Way" and "Paper Clip" opened up what Carter called "questions



An alien is hustled out of a van by federal agents in "Nisei," first of a two-part conspiracy story, one of THE X-FILES' so-called "mythology" episodes.

and an area of interest" which could be further developed in "Nisei" and "731." "I thought that Mulder had made great strides, and Scully had seen things that she had not really talked about in those episodes," Carter said. "This two-parter was a chance to show that Scully had indeed talked about these things off-screen, to answer some of those questions, and to continue with the hybrid story. I felt that this was an interesting story, continuing with Cigarette Smoking Man, who had been censured by his cohorts. Here, he showed up again in a position of reclaimed power—still working away like a termite. We also reintroduced the character of X, for the first time this season. I'm particularly happy with the ending, where the last thing you expect is for the Red-Haired Man [an assassin played by Stephen McHattie] to bash Mulder over the head, get shot, and then have X pop in and save Mulder's life. It was a very ambiguous ending. You don't know what X has come for; he just walks out from that train, and he's got Mulder on his shoulder. I thought that was good movie-making."

Dr. Ishimaru remains a shadowy character. He is seen and heard only briefly, and when Mulder finally catches up with him, he is already dead at the hands of the Red-Haired Man. Ishimaru was "a less prominent character originally," Carter noted. "You have to learn by investigation what his depredations were. He himself was of less interest to us than what he had done."

One of the best scenes in "Nisei" is Scully's eerie encounter with a group of women who, like her, had been abducted and implanted with computer chips. Real-life support groups formed by people claiming to be abductees inspired the writers. "I thought it was interesting that Dana

continued on page 62

Continuing the government conspiracy to hide the truth, the military rounds up aliens in "731."



SCRIPTING

Three of the top genre



Above: Screenwriter Caroline Thompson developed EDWARD SCISSORHANDS (with Johnny Depp and Winona Ryder) from a drawing by Tim Burton. Below Left: the bizarre imagery in JACOB'S LADDER originally sprang from the mind of Bruce Joel Rubin. Below right: Richard LaGravenese's script for THE FISHER KING (starring Robin Williams and Jeff Bridges) earned an Oscar nomination.

Fade In. These are probably the two most terrifying words for any screenwriter. They signal more than the beginning of a screenplay; they mark the beginning of a journey. For the writer, this journey will be a sometimes joyous, sometimes tortuous experience. But when a screenplay is done well, every moment of the writer's struggle comes across on screen.

"Writing for film is an art and a craft that's evolving constantly," said Syd Field, a noted teacher, lecturer, and author of four books on screenwriting. "It never is staying the same, which I think is wonderful. Film is an art form that has only evolved in the 20th century, the only art form that's continually evolving due to the scientific advancements being discovered for it right now."

Nowhere is this more true than in the realm of *cinéfantastique*. "The scariest part of writing is that it's not really just craft, and you never know when you sit down to write a screenplay whether it's going to work

or not," said Bruce Joel Rubin, the Academy Award-winning screenwriter of GHOST and JACOB'S LADDER. "There's no guarantees, and that's very scary. You're really dependent on what many people call the muses; whatever those forces are that guide you and really allow you to understand what it is you're writing about, and if those forces aren't in play, you can sit there blindly working your way into the abyss."

Rubin added, "Screenwriting is less like a novel and more like sitting in front of a campfire, weaving a tale. There's something very organic about it: it's very seductive; it's telling the right little pieces of information that suck people deeper and deeper into the story. It's mostly about trying to have people sit around with their mouths open, staring at the screen. That's really what you want: people totally suspended from their life and engaged in your storytelling."

When audiences are fully engaged and science-fiction, fantasy, and horror scripts hit all the right chords, they transcend the genre. But, with these genres constantly expanding, where does a screenwriter begin? Richard LaGravenese, who received an Oscar nomination for THE FISHER KING and also adapted A LITTLE PRINCESS, with Elizabeth Chandler, said, "I start off with characters and themes that I want to explore. The theme that I wanted to explore in [FISHER KING] goes back to '86, when I first got the idea. I was fascinated by the height of narcissism that hit in the '80s, and I wanted write a story about a narcissistic man, who by the end of the movie commits a selfless act."

Caroline Thompson, whose scripts include EDWARD SCISSORHANDS and THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRIST-



FILM FANTASIES

writers explain the secrets of their success.

MAS begins at an even less-structured point. "I'm totally instinctive. By that, I mean that I've watched so many movies in my life that the rhythm is inside me. I don't do anything consciously: I don't outline; I don't do index cards. I just sit down and go at it, and it seems to work out."

While "going at it," screenwriters do share a certain framework to their work that Syd Field calls "the paradigm." He explained, "The basic dynamics of story form will never change. There's always a beginning, a middle and end, not necessarily in that order." Field introduced the concept of the paradigm in his first book, *Screenplay*. The paradigm acts as sort of a time line for the story that a script is telling. It consists of Acts I, II, and III: set up, confrontation, and resolution. Within each of these acts there should be "plot points," events that "spin" the story in a new direction. A screenplay must also be concise and economical, as roughly one page will equal one minute of screen time. Because of this, characters and situations must be set up quickly, from page one, and move like lightning to the plot points and onto the conclusion.

This flexible structure acts as the backbone for all great genre scripts, both produced and unproduced. But, with so many screenplays flooding the marketplace, how does one crack into the "biz"? For screenwriters, the answer seems to be taking any road that will get you there. "In the beginning, I thought of being an actor," recalled LaGravenese, "I actually wrote all along, all through acting school. I wrote my own monologues; I even wrote monologues for other people." Then LaGravenese fell into screenwriting almost accidentally, while writing skits for a



In a rare situation, Thompson completed the script for TIM BURTON'S *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS* after work had begun on the animation.

stand-up act he had. His work caught the ear of an ex-SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE writer, who was working on a script. "That's when it started," he said. "While I was doing that, I started writing FISHER KING on my own."

Caroline Thompson also found success before coming to Hollywood, having written a horror novel entitled *FIRST BORN*, a disturbing and gruesome tale of "an abortion that comes back to its mommy." "Penelope Spheeris had wanted to make it into a movie," said Thompson. "I thought that was so great that I gave her the option for a dollar on the understanding that we would write the screenplay together, which we did. It clearly never got made into a movie, but I fell in love with screenwriting."

Bruce Joel Rubin had a different motive for pursuing a career in screenwriting. "I always wanted to be a director. Most people who want to be directors don't necessarily know how to get there, and since there's very

few avenues open to walking into that spot in Hollywood, you have to prove that you're capable. I felt I would start by writing, which would give me some access, which is actually what a lot of people do nowadays. It's a very effective approach, because, it's much cheaper to write a script than to direct a movie."

Now that he knew what he wanted to do, Rubin faced the question that taunts most screenwriters: What to write about? This is especially true of genre scripts, where audience reaction tends to be "been there, done that." Rubin said, "I always knew I wanted to make movies, but having a subject that anybody would pay attention to is actually a fairly complicated thing."

Around this time, Rubin took a year off and "hitchhiked around the world," which allowed him to expand his view of life. He also began a meditative practice that created a spiritual awareness which would become a permeating theme in all his work. "By

finding that I had a voice and had something to say," he recalled, "my career began. Then it was what I wanted to write about and finding filmic metaphors for those spiritual ideas I was forming."

These spiritual ideas are especially evident in Rubin's most famous script, *GHOST*. The film, however, also has its roots in the work of Shakespeare. Like Hamlet haunted by the spirit of his father, Rubin wanted to create a story in which a ghost enlists the help of a mortal, in order to avenge his own death. From this first idea through finished product, *GHOST* would become one of the most successful genre films of recent years. For Bruce, watching his words on paper flower into this phenomenon has been nothing short of, well, a spiritual experience. "It's the best ride I've ever had in my life," he admitted. "It was a great pleasure to write; I worked with some wonderful people throughout the entire making of the film, and it ended up with an Oscar. So, it was like starting the season and winning the Super Bowl."

Before such a winning season, Rubin penned a lesser known genre script, *JACOB'S LADDER*, which ironically was made after *GHOST*. "Even as late as *JACOB'S LADDER*, I hadn't really seen a screenplay, so I wrote *JACOB'S LADDER* like a theatrical script. In a funny way, I think that made it more attractive to people." Another attraction was the unique puzzle of a story, as it unravels the experience of a man on the brink of the afterlife. "I had begun by wanting to write a movie about the mind of a man who had died," said Rubin. For the structure of this story, Rubin originally wanted to use the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, but found problems in translating

by

Mike Lyons

SCRIPTING FILM FANTASY

THE WRITE PUBLICITY

Writers fight to get their fair share of credit for films they help to create.

Screenwriters often don't receive the recognition they deserve. Like wallflowers who help arrange a party and then never receive an invitation, writers miss out on the publicity that surrounds a major release. They are usually not a part of the press junkets, marketing ploys, and big premieres that hype some of Hollywood's biggest films. All of that could be changing.

No longer content with working in relative obscurity, many screenwriters are now hiring publicists to raise public awareness of themselves and their work when a film they have written is released. Harvey Warren, a member of the Writers Guild of America's Media Relations Board, said, "Writers have found that, if they can get in front of the press and get visibility, they will be more recognizable as artists contributing to the movie process, and they will have greater chances for exercising influence on the outcome of that process. They cannot be overlooked if they are no longer invisible."

Why would Hollywood want to keep the writer off stage? In a *Los Angeles Times* article this June, screenwriter Charles Edward Pogue, who spent six years developing the script for *DRAGONHEART*, claimed that he decided to obtain a personal publicist after he was shut out of the film's marketing campaign. Pogue said he clashed with the film's director, Rob Cohen, who then tried to "muzzle" the writer. (A spokesperson for Cohen denied the allegations.)

"There's always a creative



Clive Barker is an exception (along with Stephen King and Michael Crichton)—i.e., a genre writer whose presence is considered essential when promoting a film. Other writers are following these examples, hiring personal publicists and staking their claim to fame.

rights agenda," said Warren, "which is, 'Who is the author of a motion picture?' It's a very large argument that's been raging in Hollywood for years. Many like to think that the director is the author, but we like to think that the writer has a lot to do with authoring the film, since they are the seminal individuals of the work to begin with."

Adding fuel to the recent publicity movement is the fact that the price tags for many scripts have hit the stratosphere, increasing public curiosity for the writers receiving these pay checks. "Those individuals who get extremely high figures for their screenplays are recognizable brand names," added Warren. "It's like a director or a star—writers become assets to the picture."

Many writers have also become hyphenates, either producing or directing films from their own scripts, which allows them a greater chance to act as spokespersons for the finished work (for example, Dean Devlin for *INDEPENDENCE DAY* and David Twohy for *THE ARRIVAL*.) Still, other than a handful of names, such as Michael Crichton, Stephen King, and Clive Barker, movie-goers are often oblivious to the writer.

The Writers Guild of America has taken steps to stop this. A recent issue of the *WGA Journal* provides a guideline for writers who are interested in obtaining the services of a publicist. Warren explained, "What the Writers Guild has said to its membership is, 'Hey, don't be

shy! Don't hide in your room! Go see the people; go talk about your movie; go be a part of the filmmaking process!'"

So now screenwriters, those somewhat unsung members of a film's production process, are poised to join the ranks of superstar actors, mega-power producers, and revered directors, in placing their faces in front of audiences and putting their names alongside their movies. "Writing has to do with long term commitment to an idea," said Warren. "People need to understand that there was a mind behind it that believed in it for a long time. The guys who create that work and risk their homes, their cars and their personal lives to stand behind those big ideas, really need to be recognized." **Mike Lyons**

this for the screen. Then, 25 pages into the writing of *JACOB'S LADDER*, he remembered a short story entitled "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," by Ambrose Bierce, (which shares a similar plot twist with *JACOB'S LADDER*). Rubin found that this could actually be the backbone for his story and it set his creativity free. "I got so excited that I couldn't sit down for almost two hours. I just kept running around my house at the time with this thrill that I understood what my movie was."

One of the first things that brought *JACOB'S LADDER* notoriety was an article in the magazine, *American Film*, in which the script was voted one of the ten best unproduced screenplays of that period. "That was very much a plus for me, when I was arriving in Hollywood," said Rubin, "because that all happened before I moved here. Hollywood is a town where everybody has to know everybody else's business, so when I met people, they knew who I was and that definitely was an advantage."

Among the ocean of genre screenplays, being singled out this way can obviously be advantageous, which is how *FISHER KING* found itself in the forefront. "By the time I finished [the script]," remembers Richard LaGravenese, "it was the middle of that long writers strike. So, after all this work, no one could read, and no one could buy. I had to wait about two months after that. Then, two weeks after the writers strike ended, it was bought. I remember the executive at the studio telling me, 'It's amazing,' he said. 'We all thought that during the writers strike, when every writer had this time to work on their own, that they would've written a lot of personal, original work, and we were all amazed that after the strike, we were flooded with cop movies.' So, when [*FISHER KING*] came along, it stood out."

From his aforementioned idea of writing a story about a selfish man who commits an unselfish act, LaGravenese put *THE FISHER KING* through various stages. "It took three or four drafts of completely different stories—I mean completely different movies with different

plots but the same characters, and with each draft I came closer and closer to what ultimately became *THE FISHER KING*. With each draft, a new character popped up, or each character revealed itself a little bit more, and I didn't know where I was going plot-wise; it just sort of revealed itself to me."

LaGravenese hooked into the myth of the Holy Grail as the basis for the story, not through the traditional Arthurian legend, but through Jungian Psychology and a book entitled *He* by Robert Johnson, which examines the Grail myth and how it relates to male psychology. "One core idea in it," said LaGravenese, "was that we contain all the archetypes within us, and ultimately all men are both the wounded king and the fool, and the only way that we will find our souls again is through the fool, because only the fool will make that journey and heal the wounded king."

LaGravenese crafted a screenplay that contains such deep, novelistic elements as foreshadowing and symbolism. He noted, "I wasn't intentionally doing that. But I am a big reader, and my screenplays tend to be written more like short stories, even things like the directions and character descriptions. I remember the description of Anne, the Mercedes Ruehl character in *THE FISHER KING*, took about a half a page, where I really wanted to get a whole sense of her—what she thought and what she felt. I tend to get very descriptive, so that when you read the script, it's almost like reading a short novel. I find that that's better. You have to understand, most of people who are reading your stuff are not writers, and they tend to just skip through and read the dialogue. But, I've found that unless you know what the character is feeling and what the point of view is and unless you're reading the description, you're not going to read the dialogue in the right way and you lose the thread of the story. So, I take pains to be more detailed in that area."

In any other director's hands, *FISHER KING* may have lost its strong narrative thrust, but Terry Gilliam decided to do something almost un-

BRUCE JOEL RUBIN

"Writing for me is a literary event. It's not just setting down the blueprint of a movie. It's creating the emotional flow, the urgency. That's what I've learned at my typewriter."



Screenwriter Bruce Joel Rubin (left) first came to attention for writing *JACOB'S LADDER*, which was eventually filmed by director Jonathan Lyne in 1990.

heard of in Hollywood: have the writer on the set. "Terry comes from a group of writers. On *MONTY PYTHON*, they were all writers. They all paired off in different combinations, but they were all writers," said LaGravenese. "So he comes from a background where you protect the writing and that makes sense to him. He really doesn't understand how anyone could do it any other way. We had a close relationship on the set and still do."

Caroline Thompson has also been fortunate to share a kindred relationship with another great genre director, Tim Burton. After adapting her novel *First Born*, Thompson fortuitously found herself at the same agency that represented Burton. "Quite honestly, they didn't know what to do with either of us," she laughed. "He had just made *PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE*, and I had just done this strange screenplay." Once they were introduced, Burton and Thompson became fast friends. They then began bouncing ideas off of one another and Burton told Thompson about this drawing he had done in high school, that he had expanded into an idea for a film. "I never

even saw the drawing," recalled Thompson, "but [Tim] just said, 'Well, it's a picture of a guy who's got scissors instead of hands.' I said, 'Stop. That's it.' It was one of those miraculous things where the story came to me in a flash." Thus was born *EDWARD SCISSORHANDS*, for which Thompson adds that she had no problem working with characters and ideas that came from someone else's imagination. "The story would have never existed but for the brilliance of Tim's image. I consider it one of the greatest gifts that anyone's ever given me."

Thompson would go on to collaborate with Burton again on the stop-motion animated film, *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*. This was a different experience for Caroline, who came onto the project not only after Danny Elfman had written all the songs for the film but also after sets and puppets had been built! After a first writer failed to deliver a script, Burton, who was serving as *NIGHTMARE*'s producer, called on her to help. Thompson went to the studios in San Francisco, where the animators had begun shooting, and then wrote the film's script. "It was like be-

ing an architect and being called in to build a house people were already living in," she said. Thompson's largest modification in the story was to the character Sally, who was designed more like Elvira in the early stages. "I wanted her to be much frailer," said Thompson, "more like a little match stick girl version of a Frankenstein monster." It was then that Thompson came up with the idea of transforming Sally into a human rag doll, who could "go to pieces" and then stitch herself back together. "I grew my part of the story out the Sally character," she added.

Such is the world of the screenplay, where characters become part of the writer and plots become real. But, for all those people who walk out of the latest genre film feeling that "they could do that," here is some good advice: "If you want to get a movie made, you write and you write and you write," said Thompson, "until you're so sick of writing that you'll only know whether you're really a good writer by the fact that you keep writing."

Syd Field echoes this sentiment, adding that writers should familiarize themselves with the screenplay form and not be blinded by the rising price tags Hollywood sometimes doles out for scripts. Instead, it should be written from a more personal perspective. "If you want to write a screenplay, sit down and write the screenplay," says Field. "Not because you want to sell it for a zillion bucks, but simply to write it, because you want to write it and you think you can tell a great story. Which you probably can."

With this love for the medium, and ability to write from the heart and not for the marketplace, genre screenwriters, like all writers in the industry, strive for that indefinable quality that lifts a script out of the "unread pile." "Writing for me is a literary event," said Rubin. "It's not just setting down the blueprint of a movie, as many people call it. It's to really create the emotional flow of the movie, to create the urgency and the rooting interest of the script. That's what I've finally learned to do at my time at the typewriter. That's what were all trying to do as writers." □

THE STRANGE WORLD COFFIN JOE

Brazil's best-kept secret reaches U.S. video

He is one of horror's best kept secrets—a blaspheming, megalomaniacal sadist, torturing and killing with impunity all who stand in the way of his life's mission: to find a perfect woman, capable of siring an heir to ascend his blood-soaked throne. Contemptuous of society's dictums, and believing only in heredity (he knows his soul is Hellbound), he is Brazil's singularly compelling gift to Grand Guignol: Splatterdom's murderous, mouthiest Iago is one of the sickest—albeit strangely ambivalent—demons to walk cinefantastique's long, low-budget night.

His behind-the-camera alter ego is also one of the genre's best kept secrets—labeled a blaspheming, megalomaniacal sadist whose movies have been called “a genuine psychopath's private fantasies pathetically proffered as a plea for help...” (*The Overlook Encyclopedia of Horror Movies*, Phil Hardy)—he is Brazilian auteur José Mojica Marins, and his creation is Zé do Caixão (known as “Coffin Joe” in English, though a literal translation would be “Joe, the Grave”).

Having recently gained some small cult awareness in this country—thanks to video—that sadistic, free-thinking grave digger with the black bowler is now poised to continue his gore-splashed quest for matrimonial bliss; Marins prepares to conclude his Coffin Joe trilogy, which began in 1963 with *AT MIDNIGHT I WILL POSSESS YOUR SOUL* and



Writer-director-star José Mojica Marins prepares to work a little mischief as Zé do Caixão—i.e. “Coffin Joe”—in *AT MIDNIGHT I'LL POSSESS YOUR SOUL*.

continued in the 1966 sequel *TONIGHT I WILL INCARNATE IN YOUR CORPSE*.

Said Marins in an exclusive interview during his recent tour of the U.S. horror convention circuit, “Right now I’m finalizing the last movie of the trilogy of Coffin Joe’s quest for the perfect woman. It’s called *THE EYE AT THE GATES OF HELL*. There’s 40 minutes of it already shot, and now I’m looking for a producer to help me finish the other 40 I need to complete the movie. I’ve already talked to several people, and the prospects are very good. Basically, my only expense would be to buy the negative in the U.S. and fly it to Brazil. My crew, which I’ve used for a long time, practically works for free; plus, I already

have ways to distribute the movie in Brazil.”

Of the struggle to secure financing, Marins quipped, “A lot of people say the Brazilian cinema is dead. It’s only sick. Right now it needs a doctor, and in this case I’m the best doctor for it. It’s very difficult to make a movie in Brazil. Only one or two movies are made a year, and for the last 20 years, they’ve all been lousy—except for a few.”

Discussing whether he might make a U.S.-backed production, Marins was optimistic. “I would, but first I’d have to hire non-professional actors (like in *THE BICYCLE THIEF*). I would also have to bring my crew from Brazil, because they’re used to working with me. Other people just aren’t

crazy enough to understand how I work. I only want people who are willing to do anything I ask. Since there would also be a language problem shooting in America, the best thing for me to do would be to shoot the movie in Brazil and then subtitle it in the U.S.” Marins added, “It takes about 12 to 14 days to shoot and edit my movies. Since my actors and crew know how I work, we make films very quickly together.”

Based in Sao Paulo, where he began his career in the late '50s by organizing his own studio in an abandoned synagogue (!), Marins gained notoriety in 1963 with the first Zé film, proving himself among the most eccentric—and self-absorbed—personalities in the genre: given that 1963 witnessed the subdued horrors of Robert Wise’s *THE HAUNTING*, Terence Fisher’s *THE GORGON*, and a plethora of Corman-Poe flicks, Marins’ film must be accorded the status of being one of the forbearers of that genre black horse, *The Splatter Movie*. Even so, Marins’ films, unlike the poverty-row H. G. Lewis efforts, remain fascinating due to their heart of genuinely pitch-black (if obtuse) inquiry. Cheap as they are, and with a level of thesping that never rises above the conscripted sub-proletariat, *AT MIDNIGHT I WILL POSSESS YOUR SOUL* and *TONIGHT I WILL INCARNATE IN YOUR CORPSE* are the work of a filmmaker using the medium for self-introspec-

ANALYSIS BY TODD FRENCH & INTERVIEW BY JAY JENNINGS

OF

connoisseurs.

tion and query.

SOUL presents Caixão as a diabolical undertaker who holds a small Brazilian village in horrified thrall. Garbed in black cape and top hat, with exaggerated eyebrows and gnarling nails, Zé is an unmitigated monster, in spite of the fact that he is a relative small-fry—equal parts smartass bush-league pundit and dungeon master. Yet for all his outlaw trappings, he has a single redemptive touch: to the vicious Zé, children are sacrosanct, the perfect expression of humanity.

When he learns that his long-suffering wife Lenita (Valeria Vasquez) is barren, Zé, desperate to perpetuate his bloodline, kills her with chloroform and venomous spiders. Deciding that Terezinha (Magda Mei), fiancée of his best friend (Nivaldo De Lima) is a "Superior Woman"—i.e., the ideal vessel to bear the heir to his blasphemous throne—Zé drowns his rival in a bath and then rapes the bereft woman. Zé, who believes that self-interest is the only constant of life, scoffs when she vows to commit suicide and return from the grave to claim his soul next midnight. However, he sings a different tune when Terezhina carries out the first part of her threat; later, his unease turns to terror when, on midnight on the Day of The Dead, he finds himself hounded by the spirits of his victims who—seemingly—scare him to death.

Though it is often couched in the most juvenile, sniggering crudity—the plot seems derivative of E.C. comics (Marins has

in fact adapted Zé into comic format), and the pretentious monologues are laughably arch ("What is Existence? It is the continuity of blood!")—nevertheless, there is a truly chilling sense of transgression that plays hell with the slap-dash lensing and poky pacing (even under 80 minutes, MIDNIGHT seems long). When Zé removes a crown of thorns from a statue of Christ and uses it to thrash the uncle of a recalcitrant bar-maid, it's an outlaw filmic moment Jodowrosky or Bunuel would

have applauded. Likewise, when the despicable Zé forces a gutless local to chow down on a leg of lamb during Lent (the films are highly saturated in Catholicism as much as macumba), it is a memorably cruel moment, off-putting as all the bashings, whippings, blindings, burnings and mutilations that make up the film's sizeable catalogue of atrocities.

Like most compelling film monsters, Zé proved too good to kill off and, three years later, resurfaced in TONIGHT I

Marins' name and appearance remain linked with the Coffin Joe character in the ads for subsequent films, like THE STRANGE INN OF PLEASURES.

WILL INCARNATE IN YOUR CORPSE. Healed after his near-death experience at the end of SOUL, and acquitted of his crimes due to a lack of evidence, Zé returns to his despised home village, where he again takes up his quest to find the Superior Woman who will bear his accursed brood. With the aid of his disfigured, hunch-backed assistant Bruno (De Li-

José
Mojica
Marins
(ZÉ DO CAIXÃO)

a Estranha Hospedaria dos Prazeres



Colorido

Caçador Guerreiro
Marizeth Baumgarten
David Hungaro Luzia Zaracausca
Giulio Aurichio Elza Ferreira José Nivaldo



In **BLACK EXORCISM**, Marins as himself (above) confronted his own evil creation, Coffin Joe (left). According to *The Overlook Film Encyclopedia (Horror)*, the film was evidence that Marins' "therapy through film-making was achieving positive results."

ma, the virtuous Antonio from SOUL), Zé kidnaps the town's fetching distaff population and subjects them to a series of tortures, including a spider plague. Those repulsed by the arachnids are consigned to death in a snake pit, but not before one of his (pregnant) victims promises to reincarnate in the evil Zé's corpse. He eventually finds his prospective mate in Laura (Nadia Tell), daughter of his arch-enemy, the Colonel, who proves to be even more corrupt and amoral than he. When Zé discovers that the woman who cursed him was impregnated, he suffers remorse, and is subsequently tormented by a lurid nightmare vision of Hell (an 8m 41s color insert). Attempting repentance, he is thwarted when Laura announces she is expecting, thereby substantiating Zé's vile self-defining doctrine.

Whereas SOUL was fairly spartan, CORPSE, at 107 minutes, is comparatively epic in length and ambition, even if there are only so many ways that Zé can espouse his philosophy while bashing people's skulls in with boulders, tossing them into snake-pits, etc.; at times it becomes wearying with its pretentious philosophizing ladled onto the predictable offerings of Zé's incredibly stupid antagonists. On the other hand, the technicolor phantasmagoria of the scene in which Zé gets a pre-death taste of Hell is among the most bracing bits of unadulterated chutzpa in the genre, and the sequence where Zé's would-be brides suffer an onslaught of 50 tarantulas is truly creepy.

Although Marins temporarily

abandoned Zé's search for the Perfect Woman after this film, the character, in name or likeness, continued to appear in subsequent efforts, such as the three-part anthology O ESTRANO MUNDO DE ZÉ DO CAIXÃO (THE STRANGE WORLD OF COFFIN JOE, 1968) and A ESTRANHA HOSPEDARIA DOS PRAZERES (THE STRANGE INN OF PLEASURES). Perhaps to atone for the continuing depravity of his creation, FINIS HOMINIS (FINAL MAN, 1970) and QUANDO OS DEUSES ADORMECEREM (WHEN THE GODS FALL ASLEEP, 1971) saw the advent of Marins' Finis Hominis, a sort of anti-Zé reparation fantasy character—a charismatic miracle-worker battling evil. However, Marins continued to wrestle with his original creation: both 1974's EX-CORCISMO NEGRO (BLACK EXORCISM) and 1978's DELIRIOS DE UM ANORMAL (HALLUCINATIONS OF A DERANGED MIND) saw the director literally grappling with his alter ego: playing himself in a bit of self-reflexive mano-a-mano soul-tussling, he squares off against his own creation when Zé tries to gain possession of his family and friends.

Much of Marins' work is now available thanks to Something Weird Video, a Seattle company that currently carries 13 titles. Besides the Coffin Joe series, the better known films include TRILOGIA DE TERROR (1968), INFERNO CARNAL (1976), PERVERSO and MUNDO MERCADE DO SEXO (both 1978), and ENCARNACAO DE DEMONIO

(1981). However, a definitive compilation of a Marins' oeuvre remains problematic, because the financially strapped director was wont, in the early stages of his career, to sign away the rights to his films, sometimes losing track of them.

"All of my films are practically available or obtainable," Marins insisted. "I regret that I gave away the rights to a lot of my movies to other people, and right now it's very difficult for me to get them back. Several producers won't give me back the 16mm prints of my movies." Marins chuckled, "A lot of them are hoping my airplane will crash so they can make more money."

In a 20-year period, Marins made an estimated 40 features, numerous television programs, and co-hosted three radio shows in the 1970s. Marins added, "I also have a lot of my movies in 8mm at home. They were shot back in the 1950s, so they're in

pretty bad shape. Right now, I'm seeing if I can get better copies of these movies so they can be shown. But more amazing and more difficult to get are my 150 TV shows that I've directed every week for four years on three different Brazilian stations. All the episodes are 45 to 90 minutes long, but I don't know if the TV stations got rid of them. Some of them should be obtainable."

"The prospects of new releases are very good," he continued. "Now, I'm more organized [about] getting my films from vaults and archives in Brazil's film institutes, and there are already three or four films that can be immediately released. One of them is a 1972 feature I shot on Super-8 called THE PLAGUE. Then there's a sequel to THE END OF MAN called WHEN THE GODS FALL ASLEEP. Another film is called THE PROFIT OF HUNGER, which I acted in and wrote the script. It

Like Cassandra Petersen as Elvira, Marins' horror convention appearances in the U.S. were in the garb of the character with whom he is identified, Coffin Joe.



“People confuse us a lot. They think that José Mojica Marins really is ‘Coffin Joe.’ That’s why I spent ten years making films without the character.”

was made in 1969. I also have a one-hour documentary of my audition tapes in San Paulo, where I forced people to do all sorts of bizarre things to be cast in my films.”

Marins, whose casting methods would, perhaps, not disappoint Zé, has been known to require would-be actors to lick frogs, stick snakes into their mouths, or grab live wires. Marins has been arrested on at least two occasions for his unconventional approach, and the Brazilian censor has shown little affection for his singular brand of schadenfreud.

Curiously, Marins’ films are family affairs, enabling him to pursue his oddball musings. “Several of my relatives appear in my movies,” he explained. “My father is the bartender in *AT MIDNIGHT I WILL POSSESS YOUR SOUL*, and both my mother and father help a mob lynch me in *TONIGHT I WILL INCARNATE IN YOUR CORPSE*. My mother is also the crippled, old woman on the beach in *THE END OF MAN*. My mother, who is 83, is suffering from cancer. Last year, she had treatments for it. So, in her honor, I shot a 16mm documentary showing the treatments and all the other movie scenes she appeared in. My children also appear in *BLACK EXORCISM*, and my daughter is one of the main actresses. But I owe everything to my mother. She sold the family house to pay for *AT MIDNIGHT I WILL POSSESS YOUR SOUL*.” (Marins’ interest in filming actual medical procedures extends to himself: for *HELLISH FLESH* [1976], the director incorporated footage of his own eye surgery!)

Responding to criticism that his work lost much of its early crude vitality in his post-1960s color efforts, Marins conceded that this assessment “is true.” He explained, “In my earlier films, I did everything, writing

and directing them. Then, towards the late ’60s and early ’70s, I began being hired for other people’s projects. I was the director shooting other people’s scripts. This made me very mad because sometimes I was hired to do non-horror films, and instead of using Jose Mojica Marins, they would still use the Coffin Joe name, misleading the public into thinking it was a horror film made in my style.”

In spite of their shocking and graphic nature, Marins’ films are leavened by a degree of humor (intentional or otherwise), mostly via eccentric soundtrack choices. At the end of *CORPSE*, Zé sinks into the slime to the choral approval of Gounod’s “Ave Maria” (a Marins favorite); in *O ESTRANO MUNDO*’s “Theory” episode, a climactic cannibal banquet is set to the strains of Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus.” In even more outre and objectionable taste is the use of “Auld Lange Syne” in the second *O ESTRANO* tale, “Obsession,” as accompaniment to a necrophiliac love scene. Said Marins, “I don’t use original music very often. Usually, I bootleg or sample music and sounds from other albums and movies, while trying to distort the sound by playing it backwards or at different speeds.”

Yet in spite of all the depravity in Marins’ work, a vexing question remains: are his plunges into the deepest dregs of carnage and nihilism merely a celebration of the vile, or are they actually a rather reactionary—albeit subversively couched—plaint of genuine religious conviction? Despite Zé’s constant crowing over the triumph of “heredity over reason,” seldom do Marins’ free-thinking sadistic sensualists ever end in the saddle; in spite of their maniacal individuality, they get the wicked ends that the god-fearing, superstitious peasantry believe they deserve:



At the end of *CORPSE*, Zé winds up spinelessly recanting as he’s about to drown, while a C.B. DeMille-type cross flickers upon the bubbling surface (“Man will find the truth... when he searches for it,” reads the end caption). In the *O ESTRANO* story “Theory,” the loathsome victory of Professor Oaxiac Odez (Zé do Caixão, Alucard-style) is repaid with a heavenly lightning-bolt strafe of the bad doctor’s manse, topped off by a biblical quote out of Ezekial!

Surprisingly, Marins’ own favorite film features not Zé but the benign *FINIS HOMINIS* character. “Personally, my favorite is *THE END OF MAN*,” he stated. “The one I’m most proud of making is *TONIGHT I’LL INCARNATE IN YOUR CORPSE*. Technically it was my most difficult movie, and it took the longest to shoot—three months. I had to use hundreds of real tarantulas on the actresses. They said it couldn’t be done, but it all came out beautifully.”

Recent interest in Marins’ work has prompted two written

Marins’ gained attention in his native Brazil in 1963, when he introduced Coffin Joe in *AT MIDNIGHT I’LL POSSESS YOUR CORPSE*.

projects: a biography by journalist Andre Barcinski and a magazine to be released by Something Weird Video, containing scripts, comic books, and fan correspondence. Meanwhile, Marins is releasing cassettes of his old radio shows in Brazil, and he runs a popular “Coffin Joe Phone Line,” which allows fans to call and listen to a different horror tale every day.

Marins admits fans identify him with his character: “People confuse us a lot. They used to think that Jose Mojica Marins, the filmmaker, was really ‘Coffin Joe.’ That’s why I spent 10 years making movies without the character. I wanted to try different things to show people that I could succeed without him.” □

(Mr. Marins’ comments were translated by Andre Barcinski. For a video tape of the complete interview, write: Jay Jennings 144 N. Wetherly Dr., Beverly Hills, CA 90211.)

Disney Grows Up With *HUNCHBACK*

THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

A Buena Vista release of a Walt Disney Pictures presentation. Produced by Don Halm. Co-Producer: Roy Conli. Directed by Gary Trousdale, Kirk Wise. Animation screenplay: Tab Murphy, Iren Mecchi, Bob Tzudiker, Noni White, Jonathan Roberts. Animation story: Tab Murphy, based on the novel *Notre Dame de Paris* by Victor Hugo. Original score and music: Alan Menken; lyrics Stephen Schwartz. Art direction: David Goetz. Artistic coordinator: Randy Fullmer. Paris unit sequence directors: Paul Brizzi, Gataen Brizzi. Sound: Dolby Digital. Associate producer: Phil Lofaro. Casting: Ruth Lambert. MPAA Rating: G. Running time: 86 min.

Quasimodo.....Tom Hulce
Esmeralda.....Demi Moore; Heidi Mollenhaur (singing)
Frollo.....Tony Jay
Phoebus.....Kevin Kline
Clopin.....Paul Kandel
Hugo.....Jason Alexander
Victor.....Charles Kimbrough
Laverne.....Mary Wicks; Jane Withers

by Mike Lyons

Well, it's official: animation has grown up. Oh sure, the medium always has been meant "for all ages" and has been followed closely by full-grown, educated buffs for years, but just a decade ago, animation was trapped in a prison of cardboard Saturday morning TV with no apparent way out.

The Disney animated features produced in the past ten years have allowed animation to move through high school and graduate to college. Now comes *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME* which, with deeper issues than previous Disney features, could almost be taken as animation's master's thesis, and it passes with flying, "Topsy Turvey" colors.

With this innovative take on Victor Hugo's classic, producer Don Hahn, directors Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise and their crew of artists have answered the recent, growing acceptance of the medium as something more than just a cartoon. Filled with moments of unexpected power, emotion, and humor, *HUNCHBACK* isn't just terrific animation; it's a terrific film.

The Medieval mood is set during the opening moments, as the screen is bathed in complete darkness and the theatre is filled with echoing Latin chants and the distant peal of the cathedral's bells. Then, in the opening number, "The Bells of Notre Dame," we learn the origin of Quasimodo—how he came to be trapped in the bell tower and ruled over by the warped Judge Claude Frollo. The scene ranks as one of cinema's greatest opening "grabbers" and tops *THE LION KING*'s "Circle of Life" as the studio's greatest pre-title sequence—an unexpected jolt of



The "Topsy Turvey" song is among *HUNCHBACK*'s many winning highlights.

artistry and narrative pacing.

As they did in *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*, directors Wise and Trousdale manage to maintain this pace and also bring the same "feel" of a live-action film to the proceedings. The shots within each scene of *HUNCHBACK* are so creative and original that they invoke many head-scratching, "How'd they do that?" moments. Particularly amazing are the action sequences toward the end—during which Quasimodo saves Esmeralda's life by swinging down from the belltower, and Frollo's soldiers attack the cathedral in a seamless blend of computer-generated imagery and traditional animation shots that are a true "Wow!"

Adding to this is the work of art director Dave Goetz, who has given *HUNCHBACK* the lush look of a detailed period film (this may be the first time that a cathedral steals the show!). The title character himself is also a marvel. The animated Quasimodo could have been a real disaster, but James Baxter and his team of animators do a brilliant job of walking the tightrope between not-too-cute and not-too-grotesque, using the gentle voice of Tom Hulce to fullest advantage. A scene near the climax, when a young girl emerges from the crowd to embrace Quasimodo, may rank as the most heartbreaking moment in film this year.

All of the voices in *HUNCHBACK* are actually used in a

unique way. Esmeralda seems more like her vocal counterpart Demi Moore, not only because the gypsy dancer resembles the actress, but because the animators picked up on the tomboyish spunk Moore brought to the character. Likewise, Kevin Kline's deadpan reading of his one-liners ("I didn't know you had a kid," he says to Esmeralda, upon meeting her pet goat, Djali), are perfect for the roguish, action-hero of the piece, Phoebus, the Captain of the Guard.

Another character, who many may dismiss as merely a narrator or supporting player, deserves more attention. Clopin, the Harlequin-garbed puppeteer, is a deft blend of the cartoon and the real by animator Mike Surrey. With a perfect, wily voice provided by Broadway veteran Paul Kandel, Clopin is that rare combination of good and sinister—one of the most unique characters to come out of the studio.

Like Hugo's novel, the filmmakers touch upon issues of social outcasts, religion, virtue, and vice, making the race relations of *POCAHONTAS* seem like *THE ARISTOCATS*. In one of the most powerful moments, Frollo sings of his feelings for Esmeralda in the song "Hell Fire." The much talked about scene, which no doubt sparked many a parent-child discussion, uses bold, fiery images reminiscent of *FANTASIA*'s "Night On Bald Mountain" sequence, to convey the

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FILM RATINGS

- Catch it opening night
- Worth seeing first run
- Wait for second-run
- Wait for video/cable
- Fodder for MST-3K

THE PHANTOM

Director: Simon Wincer. Paramount Pictures, 6/96, 94 mins, PG. With: Billy Zane, Treat Williams, Kristy Swanson, Patrick McGoohan.

THE PHANTOM is a fun, harmless romp through the mythos of Lee Falk's comic strip character. The film's charm lies not in its recreation of Phantom lore, however, but in its tongue-in-cheek portrayal of the action hero. Purists might take offense at such a whimsical approach, but disputes over adaptations are nothing new. The thing about such characters, however, is their inherent immutability that at once survives and welcomes variation and refashioning. The essences of the characters never change, only the context within which their stories are told.

That said, the broader the mythos, the more easily such refashioning is accepted. Unfortunately, the cornball approach here, though endearing, will do little to win new fans. It does entertain, however, and the purity of that cinematic charge is enough to invigorate the film. Treat Williams' flamboyantly excessive Xander Drax is the perfect foil for Billy Zane's quietly bemused Phantom. While there's little jeopardy in a film where the hero's sidekick berates a visitor with "No smoking in the Skull Cave!" the campiness sustains the film's momentum.

Viewed through boxoffice lenses, *THE PHANTOM* is a flop. Today's audiences demand greater realism and the film adds nothing new to the character. Viewed by itself, outside such contexts, the film is delightful fare, hearkening back to a time when heroes were allowed to have a twinkle in their eyes.

●● Matthew F. Saunders

Billy Zane stars as the Phantom, in Paramount's disappointing film version of Lee Falk's character.



LASERBLAST

By Dennis Fischer

STAR TREK: THE LETTER-BOXED SET

The film voyages of the starship Enterprise.

Paramount Home Video's STAR TREK COLLECTION features widescreen transfers of all seven TREK features, which were shot in the Panavision 2.35 aspect ratio. Unquestionably, as a set, these films are a mixed bag, though collectively they are some of the most popular sci-fi films ever made. Paramount is notorious for not chapter encoding their discs, and with the exception of STAR TREK: GENERATIONS, these discs do not feature this easy way to access each film's highlights.

The set begins with STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE, which director Robert Wise insisted be transferred from the original cut rather than the expanded home video edition. (The expanded version reinstated a few scenes detailing what Spock learns from V'ger about the barrenness of a logic-only existence.)

As ponderous as the film is at times, the special effects from Douglas Trumbull and John Dykstra are impressive; the fine score by Jerry Goldsmith is the best of the series; and even though the story owes a debt to "The Changeling" TV episode (hence the fan joke title, "Where Nomad Had Gone Before"), that only demonstrates that the film is typical TREK, on a grander scale.

THE WRATH OF KHAN was cheaper to produce but featured a richer story with more of the characterization that series fans have loved. Director Nicholas Meyer laces Jack Soward's story with various literary references and conceits, perhaps the most amusing of which is portraying genetic superman Khan (Ricardo Montalban) as a mad Ahab intent on destroying his personal White Whale: James Kirk.

THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK, written and produced by Harve Bennett and directed by Leonard Nimoy, is more perfunctory, its purpose being little more than to resurrect the beloved character. This time, the villain is Christopher Lloyd's Klingon, whose performance is more amusing than menacing. Also, given that the Enterprise had been "home" to these characters for years and was the thing Kirk loved most, its destruction, though spectacular, is not given the proper emotional overtones.

THE VOYAGE HOME remains one of the most popular efforts in the series, largely due to its effective use of humor. While Paramount also released a director's edition of this



Paramount has generously released a boxed set of the seven STAR TREK feature films, all letterboxed to preserve the Panavision widescreen ratio.

film with a short about its making, this collection features the standard version. Nimoy proves a generous enough director to allow each actor a special moment, and writer Nicholas Meyer's playful approach to the crew's encountering the 20th century help make this one of the most repeatable TREK films.

THE FINAL FRONTIER is the turkey of the group, a movie full of misjudged moments and humor. That the crew of the Enterprise would confront an alien claiming to be God and not be too impressed was actually a proposed and rejected plot for the first TREK film, and seeing it in action here simply confirms that Paramount had been right to reject it. It's also disappointing that after years of presenting Kirk as a character interested in "exploring new life and new civilizations," he is shown here casually killing some of the alien species he encounters. William Shatner's direction of the other characters proves none too flattering—they have never looked older or more ridiculous.

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY returned Nicholas Meyer to the director's chair and the series back to quality. Of all the TREK films,

this one has the best soundtrack that demands to be heard on laser, with deep rumbles that immediately establish a feeling of power. Purists object that the Star Fleet depicted here is too militaristic (the Enterprise is suddenly given battleship floors), but the theme here is the difficulty of detente in a universe filled with prejudice, and the characters are lively. The climax, which pays brief homage to THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE, was slightly clearer in the home video version than the theatrical version, and it is this home video version which has been transferred. Christopher Plummer steals the show as a scenery-chewing, Shakespeare-spouting Klingon who proves a worthy adversary, while Shatner's performance as Kirk is one of his best, as the captain must confront his own prejudices in an environment filled with deception and deceit on every side because change threatens the status quo.

Shatner also steals the show in STAR TREK: GENERATIONS, even though he only appears at the beginning and the end of the film. Unfortunately, this maiden movie voyage of the NEXT GENERA-

TION crew shortchanges most members of the ensemble with Picard involved in a plot to prevent a mad scientist from exploding a sun and destroying a civilization. The primary gimmick is a time-tripping space anomaly called the "Nexus," which catches up space travellers and provides them with their heart's fondest desire; however, the ease with which Kirk and Picard break away from the Nexus does not correspond with its supposedly addictive qualities. Nor is it more than a screenwriter's "ticking clock" to have the men return mere moments before the villain launches his rocket when returning with hours to spare would make far more sense.

What's most significant about GENERATIONS is that it is presented in Dolby Surround AC-3 digital for the best possible surround sound experience (provided one has an AC-3 encoder). AC-3 technology allows digital encoding of five independent audio channels to elicit the highest possible fidelity for multi-channel sound delivery. Not all modern films take full advantage of this technology's possibilities, but the results can be very impressive.

Additionally, Paramount has issued GENERATIONS on a two-disc set to allow fans to view the destruction of the Enterprise on side two in CAV, although the physics of such a high speed collision are simply ignored and the modelwork of the terrain is not the most convincing.

The STAR TREK film series has never really tried to be innovative science fiction; it presents no awesome concepts or unfamiliar ideas, and its very familiarity mitigates its ability to ever truly surprise the audience. However, there are more to these films than the simple shoot-'em-ups that the STAR WARS films turned into. There was always a humanistic philosophy underlying these films, and the characters are appealing enough that one enjoys spending more time with them as they go through their paces with humor and panache. STAR TREK fans are known for rewatching segments of the show endlessly, and unlike magnetic tape which will eventually lose its charge and flake off, the laserdisc format is ideal for preservation and endless repetition. □

REFLECTIONS

By Matthew F. Saunders

HOLLYWOOD: LOST IN CYBERSPACE High-Tech Concepts Can't Save Mediocre Films.

Concept alone does not a movie make. Take for instance the recent wave of cyberspace films. Once an underground sub-genre mined only by apocalyptically oriented science-fiction pessimists, the concept has been popularized during the media's recent mainstreaming of virtual reality and the Internet. Hollywood, not to be left behind, has turned its attention on the medium, and, as with any new technology (real or imagined), literature and cinema question its role in society, asking, "What will its effect be?" and "What does this technology say about us?" To that end, we find ourselves presented with a series of films that seek both to exploit the cyberspace concept and to question its integrity and merits. Unfortunately, except for two films that prefigure our present fascination with the topic, the current body of work offers little but lessons in bad filmmaking.

First introduced in *BRAINSTORM* (1981), virtual reality was an as-yet unnamed technology in which users viscerally experienced the actions of others. The movie presented "virtual experiences," not in today's computer-generated sense but through recorded, sensory-active memories. Though the results amazed the characters, the effects were potentially dehumanizing, for the chance to abandon the real world to enjoy vicarious, previously unattainable experiences was addictive. Who needed to "live" when all one's passions could be accessed and explored on computer disk?

So far, *THE NET*, with Sandra Bullock, is the only computer thriller to capture a big audience.



The supposedly hot new cyberspace genre has a batting average of just about zero. *JOHNNY MNEMONIC*, with Keanu Reeves, is one of several recent duds.

Brett Leonard's *THE LAWNMOWER MAN* introduced mainstream audiences to virtual reality's computer-generated world, terminology and affectations in 1992. The film took *BRAINSTORM*'s ideas a step further, extrapolating initially that the technology was not dehumanizing but possessed the key to unlocking humanity's hidden potential. Using brain stimulating chemicals with virtual landscapes and teaching programs, Dr. Angelo (Pierce Brosnan) inadvertently turns simpleton Jobe (Jeff Fahey) into a godlike being whose mental capacities far exceed his maturity or moral ability to control them. The film argues that the technology, though useful, must be approached with the same caution and prudence that any technological advance must warrant; for, when used wrongly, it also can be debilitating and destructive. The film preaches temperance, contending that humanity's technological adeptness doesn't always match its moral and ethical maturity to safely sustain it.

After this precedent, virtual reality became the new thematic whipping boy for the genre's

continuing commentary on humanity's relationship with its technology. Both films allow us to marvel at cyberspace and its potential, while underscoring its dangers in the same breath, from well-intentioned misuse to its interpolation by corrupt agencies and individuals. They succeed through good storytelling and their exploration of the human condition vis-à-vis the technology.

Flash forward to the mid-90s, when the virtues of the Internet and Virtual Reality are doled out daily. Cyberspace, no longer a dalliance for the underground technoculture, is a playground for the Everyman. Everyone plugged into E-mail, on-line services, and World Wide Web is an erstwhile cyberpunk, in the most watered down sense. Hollywood, sensing the trend, began pumping out films, exploiting cyberspace as the latest thematic gold mine. *VIRTUOSITY*, *STRANGE DAYS*, *JOHNNY MNEMONIC*, *THE NET*, *HACKERS*, and *LAWN-MOWER MAN 2: JOBE'S WAR* entered theaters, all brandishing the cyber-mania banner.

The new films all fail to explore the technology beyond simple pedestrian terms, however, offering their cyber material as props in unsatisfying, often refashioned stories. Little is done to explore the technology in new ways, and most malign their inspiration, rely-

ing on the cliché of technology as evil, without attempting to reach that conclusion honestly through well-told stories.

Take *VIRTUOSITY*, the second cyber piece in Brett Leonard's growing V.R. oeuvre. The premise is promising, that of a virtual villain escaping into the "real world" via a nano-technology created body. What Leonard does with the concept, however, is trite and unimaginative. SID 6.7 simply becomes a cyber-Terminator that must be hunted down and stopped within the confines of a disgraced-cop-seeks-redemption-against-unstoppable-bad-guy plot. Little is done to explore the technological or moral implications raised by such an achievement, except to say that, by proxy, the technology is bad because SID is bad. Questions about our ability to create virtual life and our subsequent complicity for its behavior are supplanted by pointless action sequences.

Such is also the case with *STRANGE DAYS*. Incorporating a more *BRAINSTORM*-esque notion of V.R., we are presented with a dystopian, millennial society where addicts have chosen CD-ROMs of past memories (one's own and others) as the drug of choice. Essentially a crime story of betrayal and murder, the film does little to confirm, despite its grim cyberpunk drappings, *BRAINSTORM*'s fear of the technology's exploitation. It is simply window-dressing, easily replaced in a story more concerned with its own despair than with the technology that supposedly (according to the film's subtext) helped to spawn that despair.

JOHNNY MNEMONIC, based on William Gibson's seminal cyberpunk text, also fails because, among other problems, it is too wrapped up in its own eccentricities for anyone to care. Its dystopian near-future presents characters so inaccessible that we have no stake in them or their story. And the technology is overplayed, attempting to become so integral to the story that it ultimately supplants it, feeding us props and techno-babble that are meaningless without context. While the commodization of information and the notion of mnemonic carriers is intriguing, the movie relies solely on these concepts instead of real

drama to sustain our interest.

In a different vein, *THE NET* and *HACKERS* address similar information-as-commodity issues through their strictly Internet focus. In *THE NET*, Sandra Bullock's character is "wiped" from existence over possession of a sensitive computer disk, Internet-accessible computer records representing her only source of identity legitimization. In *HACKERS*, rebellious Gen X computer geniuses face social disenfranchisement over possession of similarly valued information. Both films play to society's fear of information as power—control of the Internet being the instrument that exercises it—but both chose to perpetuate the myth that hackers, be they teenage kids or government/corporate conspirators, control the digital fabric of our lives with unshakable completeness. Our electronic dependence is indisputable, but its total control of our lives is simply a contrivance that carries the films through hackneyed plots of intrigue and teen angst.

Rounding out the current crop is *LAWNMOWER MAN 2*, the alleged sequel to Leonard's original, introductory work. Merging all of the preceding films' missteps, it painfully retreads old ground, presenting in one package everything that's wrong with current cyberspace films. Ignoring the fact that Jobe's body was desiccated in the original, he returns, crippled and lacking his mental abilities, to wage war against a corrupt corporation, teenage whiz kids, and a brilliant-but-reclusive virtual reality scientist for possession of a computer chip that will grant him control over cyberspace and humanity. Gone from the original is the Frankensteinian parable; what's left is a mess of clichés and special effects that are held captive by the sum of their ill-conceived parts.

What draws many of us to *cine-fantastique* is the chance to embrace stories that entertain, to be filled with wonder, to have our minds opened, and to explore the wonder of our existence and the worlds around us, both real and imagined. Cyberspace is one such world, and where most of these films fall short is in failing to acknowledge and embrace that simple point. Many films explore teen angst, crime, and government conspiracy; precious few explore cyberspace with any depth. The concept deserves to be more than just a gimmick stitched into an all-too-familiar plot. □

CINEMA

By Steve Biodrowski

The bad thing about being a long-lead-time magazine is that it is difficult to be current with reviews; the great thing is that it gives a chance to see what other reviewers are writing before we put in our two cents, so it's possible in a sense, to review the reviewers.

What brings this to mind is the critical reaction to *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE*, which if we are to believe everything we read, is nothing more than a typical roller-coaster summer movie, with little plot and an excess of action. On the other hand, anyone who's actually bothered to watch the film has seen that it is actually quite different.

What's most notable about it, first off, is the almost complete absence of action. There's an early sequence in which the IMF team's plan goes horribly awry; midway, there is an incredible suspense set piece when Tom Cruise, now a rogue agent, breaks into his own former headquarters; and of course, there is the memorably stunning CGI train sequence at the climax.

The rest of the movie, however, sustains itself entirely on plot—a fact which has gone mostly unnoted in the press. Certainly, as some have suggested, the characterizations are given short shift; but considering the running time, one has to wonder about the viability of another half-hour of screen time devoted to developing the characters. Would the critics really have enjoyed a film that ran three hours long, or would that have simply provided them with different ammunition—to attack the film for

Producer-star Tom Cruise kills off the IMF team in *MISSION:IMPOSSIBLE*, so he won't have to share the screen; otherwise, the film is surprisingly good.



MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

Reviewing the reviewers

being indulgently long?

Actually, there is really only one overall flaw in *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE*, which clearly derives from Cruise's status as producer: whereas the TV show featured the teamwork of an ensemble, the feature almost immediately kills off the team so that the rest of the film can focus almost solely on Cruise.

But aside from this one problem, the film is actually not the impersonal studio product one might have expected. Interestingly enough for fans of director Brian DePalma, *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE* really does fit in with his previous oeuvre. DePalma's films, whether or not he wrote them, have almost always featured creative and talented young people who were betrayed by their parental authority figures, which forced the youthful heroes to turn the tables on their oppressors, often with violent results.

Certainly this holds true with the film's version of Jim Phelps (Jon Voight), who in a wonderfully subversive twist turns out to be a traitorous double agent. This touch so perfectly reflects the realities of espionage (as personified by Aldrich Ames) that only someone hopelessly addicted to the nostalgia appeal of the show would object (indeed, some have). However, instead of being disappointed by this assault on orthodoxy, we should the film's nerve and appreciate the fact that instead of doing a bloated Bond pastiche, DePalma and scripters David Koepp and Robert Town elected to take an approach that has more in common with *THE*



"You know you want it," said Ralph Fiennes in the *STRANGE DAYS* trailer. But was he right?

SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD. Actually, when you stop to think about it, it is amazing that this dark, plot-heavy movie managed to pass itself off as a dumb action movie that managed to become a summer blockbuster.

While on the subject of confusing critical reactions, this is a nice opportunity, while tucked next to the cyberspace article on the left, to raise a question about one critic's comments regarding *STRANGE DAYS*. A sentence in Thomas Doherty's belated review (*CFQ* 27:9), echoing the film's own ad campaign, states that director Kathryn Bigelow and producer-screenwriter James Cameron "know that you, the movie-goer, want 'it.'" (The "it" in question is Bigelow's high-tech visual assault, which is meant to echo the sensory impact of the plot's *SQUID* technology.)

Criticism is subjective. What we really expect in a good review is the writer's ability to articulate his personal views in a way that is enlightening for the reader. But proclaiming an opinion as if it were an objective fact is another matter. *STRANGE DAYS* was one of last year's most resounding flops; clearly, therefore, movie-goers did not "want it." Box office doesn't necessarily equate with quality, but whatever the film's aesthetic virtues (and there are some) involving the audience wasn't one of them, and any defense of the film should properly make its appeal on other grounds. □

FANT-ASIA

By Dr. Craig D. Reid

SHADOW OVER HONG KONG: Haunted by 1997 mainland reunion.

Next year, Hong Kong will revert back to Mainland China, and the old British postage stamp colony, including the film industry, will face new uncertainties. Symbolically, the following Fant-Asia Films not only represent some soon-to-be classics but also reflect a commemoration of what once was and what might be.

Ching Siu Tung's land-bound equivalent of Michael Curtiz's *CAPTAIN BLOOD* swashbuckling action style combines with director Johnny To's savvy for the surreal to forge the triple-loop roller coaster ride *HEROIC TRIO* (Paka Hill, 1992, 87 mins). Starring the top three moxie maulers of Fant-Asia, and set against the semi-darkness of a quasi-future, the film powerfully unravels a taut, gut-wrenching tragedy of a society threatened by a would-be overlord.

Anita Mui plays a masked, sword-wielding neo-wonderwoman, initially seen running across power lines attempting to foil another baby-napping by some invisible force that has been plaguing Hong Kong. Maggie Cheung is Thief Catcher Yat, a shotgun-toting, motorcycle-riding bounty hunter. And Michelle Khan is Ching San, a high-kicking, whip-flailing, sometimes-invisible hitwoman. She is forced by the evil Master Eunich to kidnap babies as part of a plan to install a puppet emperor who will rule on behalf of his underground sewer kingdom. Anthony Wong plays the zombie-like emotionless Kau, the Master's indestructible obedient assassin.

The confrontations entail the flamboyant use of spinning frocks of destruction intertwined with vicious kicks and punches, capped off with bullet-intercepting flying darts. Laced with less martial art razzle dazzle, some of the more memorable scenes includes elements from *SILVER STREAK* and *TERMINATOR*. *TRIO*'s wardrobe, sets, and props promote a 1940's look, but the ongoing implementation of contemporary and sometime futuristic influences offsets this feeling. It is actually quite a striking combination.

After the success of Jackie Chan's English-language *RUMBLE IN THE BRONX*, Tai Seng Video's newly packaged dubbed version of *TRIO* (and its sequel *THE EXECUTIONERS*) uses



An evil Raptor in *WICKED CITY*, the live-action Hong Kong film (based on the Japanese manga), released in English dubbed through Orion Home Video.

voices that actually fit the characters. The haunting resonance of Mui's ghostly singing during the credits and the soothing synthesizer score add an even stronger magical quality. Unlike *RUMBLE*, no scenes have been cut from *TRIO*'s English version. Set in a post-nuclear era when the most valuable commodity is water, *THE EXECUTIONERS* focuses less on the supernatural. Parallels to water-shortage science-fiction like *DUNE* and *MAD MAX BEYOND THUNDERDOME* are plentiful, yet the fights are once more on the cutting edge. Shot back-to-back with *TRIO* and using many of the same sets, the mood is darker; and like any adverse change forced upon a society with an identity crisis, the results can be tragic.

A less successful translation is Fox Lorber's English dub of, director Mak Tai Kit's *WICKED CITY* (released through Orion Home Video, 88 mins). Two minutes shy of the original running time, this version is the worst thing heard since the Kung Fu films of the '70s; the subtitled version is definitely preferable. Based on Hideyuki Kikuchi's futuristic novel, which pits humans against shape-shifting alien "Raptors" (dubbed "Reptoids" in the English version), producer Tsui Hark's film combines the mystique of his *A CHINESE GHOST STORY* with the hard-boiled motifs of his John Woo collaboration, *THE KILLER*. Originally slated to be

more comedic, the film takes the cultural rivalry of *ALIEN NATION* and breeds in Japanimation's eerie sensuality, focusing on the lurid images derived from the evil Raptors' carnal behavior (which should be somewhat familiar to anyone who's seen Yoshiaki Kawajiri's anime version). For example, one evil raptor, Shudo (Tatsuya Nakadai), relishes feasting on female blood while performing bizarre sexual acts. Other Raptors wish to become human and experience love, while the two human police characters, Ken (Jacky Cheung) and Taki (Leon Lai), are bent on destroying Raptors. However, we learn that Ken's mother was a Raptor and Taki had an affair with a Raptor (Michele Li).

Hong Kong is the titular city, where only money denotes success. The sagging economy and weak resistance to the money-hungry Raptors is attributed to the 1997 Communist Chinese takeover. Mak's style is filled with flashy effects and breath taking set pieces like the Raptor hitwoman who morphs into a motorcycle, an elevator, and a pinball machine. And to top it off, Shudo turns into an octopus-like monster, mounts a Boeing 747 jet, and jousts with the Raptor King within another dimension. It is truly wild to witness. □

Tai Seng Video can be reached at Tel: (415) 871-8118 or Fax: (415) 871-2392.

THE CABLE GUY

Directed by Ben Stiller. Columbia Pictures, 2/96. 91 mins. Rated PG-13. With: Jim Carrey, Matthew Broderick.

It's not great, but it's much better than anyone could have expected after the awful *ACE VENTURA: PET DETECTIVE*. As in the far superior *THE MASK*, Carrey shows the demented side of his comic persona to good effect. In a way this is the perfect film for those who don't like the overactive comedian, because you're really not supposed to like his character here; rather, you relate to Broderick's put-upon ordinary guy, who makes the mistake of inviting the anonymous Cable Guy into his life. Like many films big and small (Peter Weir's TV effort *THE PLUMBER* comes to mind, not to mention Jonathan Demme's excellent *SOMETHING WILD*), this film portrays what happens when a stranger intrudes upon an ordinary life, bringing chaos. Initially played for laughs, the premise turns darker in tone as the film progresses, ultimately turning into something just shy of a stalker movie. Some nice pot-shots are taken at TV along the way, which is blamed for the Cable Guy's psychosis. Still, the thematic aspirations ultimately take a back seat to Carrey mugging—and I mean that literally, since one of the big "jokes" in the film is watching him beat up some obnoxious loser in a men's room, which we are meant to find terribly amusing. ●● Jay Stevenson

ERASER

Directed by Chuck Russell. Warner Bros., 6/96. 115 mins. Rated R. With: Arnold Schwarzenegger, James Caan, Vanessa Williams, James Coburn.

High-tech weaponry pushes this entertaining but unexceptional effort into the genre. Director Chuck Russell (*THE MASK*) does a good job of pushing the action along at a breakneck clip; Schwarzenegger delivers his trademark one-liners, and the supporting cast is strong. The best sequence, a free-fall sans parachute, is shamelessly copped from *MOONRAKER*, but to great effect. The film also features *JURASSIC PARK* style crocodiles in an encounter in the New York zoo—a sequence that would have been revoltingly violent were it

Though Leslie Nielsen tries to *SPY HARD*, he generates very few laughs.



Summer behemoth earns its hype

INDEPENDENCE DAY

A 20th Century Fox release of a Centropolis Entertainment production. Produced by Dean Devlin. Executive producers: Roland Emmerich, Ute Emmerich, William Fay. Directed by Roland Emmerich. Screenplay: Devlin, Emmerich. Music: David Arnold. Production design: Oliver Scholl, Patrick Tatopoulos. Art direction: Jim Teegarden. Set design: Pamela Klamer, Sean Haworth, Mick Ourkars, Julia Levine. Costume design: Joseph Porro. Sound (Dolby): Jeff Wesler. Visual effects supervisors: Volker Engel, Douglas Smith. MPAA Rating: PG-13. Running time: 145 min.

Capt. Steve Hiller.....	Will Smith
President Thomas J. Whitmore.....	Bill Pullman
David Levinson.....	Jeff Goldblum
Marilyn Whitmore.....	Mary McDonnell
Julius Levinson.....	Judd Hirsch
Constance Spano.....	Margaret Colin
Russell Casse.....	Randy Quaid
Gen. William Grey.....	Robert Loggia
Albert Nimziki.....	James Rebhorn
Maj. Mitchell.....	Adam Baldwin

by Steve Biodrowski

Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin have turned out competent genre potboilers in the past (MOON 44, UNIVERSAL SOLDIER), and STARGATE (1994) showed an impressive epic sweep in its conception, but in general their work has had a certain lackluster quality to it—the absence of any kind of vision, style, or panache that would lift their filmmaking above the run-of-the-mill genre standards. Therefore, it is something of a pleasant surprise to announce that their current summer behemoth, INDEPENDENCE DAY, mostly transcends the limitations of their earlier work.

To be sure, their limitations are still on view: they have not suddenly developed a subtle grasp of characterization or learned how to stage a dramatic scene with any great conviction. However, the film they have constructed plays to their strengths so well that the weakness are dwarfed, if not completely eclipsed in comparison.

Basically, what they serve up here is an almost perfect realization of the movie you eagerly anticipated when, as a kid in the '50s, you saw some poster or coming attractions trailer for an alien invasion movie, only to find out that the actual film was 75 minutes of talk, some stock footage, and a few cheap special effects. (We are of course referring not to WAR OF THE WORLDS, DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL, etc., but to the American International Pictures type of product). In ID4, you get the real thing: an apocalyptic confrontation of staggering proportions, with enough special effects and pyrotechnics to satisfy that long-remembered youthful anticipation.



An over-the-top Brent Spiner enlivens the human side of INDEPENDENCE DAY.

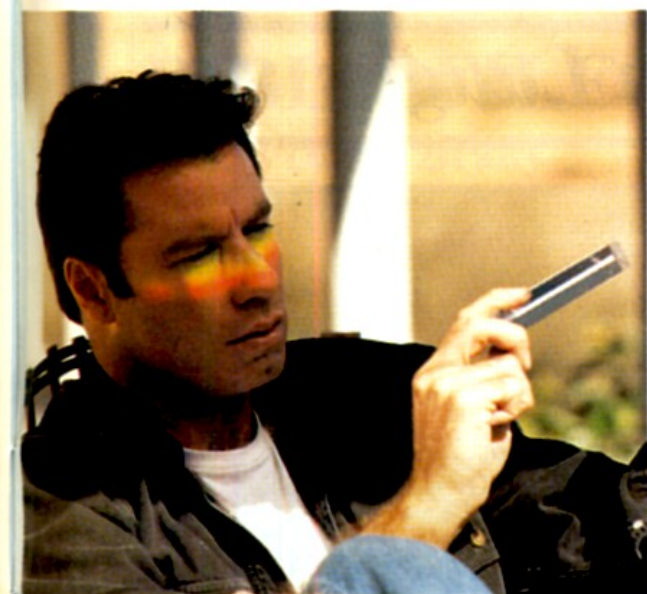
To be fair, there's more than just explosions: the Devlin-Emmerich script provides plenty of other grist for the mill, and as a director, Emmerich orchestrates that mayhem to great effect. Rather than just an effects spectacular, the film really does capture a genuine sense of suspense, of impending doom proceeding from an implacable, utterly alien foe with whom there can be no negotiation. Nowhere is this more evident than in the opening 45 minutes, which consists mostly of a countdown to the first attack. The scenes are constructed so well that the audience hardly notices that, for the most part, it is simply *waiting* for something to happen.

Once the ball really gets bouncing, the script fairly deftly moves its ensemble cast together so that they can put aside their differences and unite to defeat the common enemy. The calculation on the part of the filmmakers is utterly transparent, with the ethnically diverse characters (WASP, black, Jewish), but it's so well-intentioned that it would be picayune to quibble. The plot requires a rather healthy dose of suspension of disbelief (Jeff Goldblum's announcement that he can bring down the aliens' defensive force field with a computer virus is such an easy writer's device that it elicits audible groans), but for the most part the film earns this indulgence from its audience. For instance, when Will Smith pilots an alien fighter vehicle at the climax,

we have to accept that he could learn how to handle it in a few minutes, but the thing has supposedly been lying around since crashing at Roswell, New Mexico, so at least there's been time to study it.

Generally, the human interaction fails to equal the combat scenes. The film really does live up to its other model, the '70s disaster film, with a slew of familiar faces filling out two-dimensional stereotypes. The cast brings enough screen presence to help compensate for this, but only Goldblum, with his eccentric character ticks, and Smith, with his straight-arrow sincerity, manage any interesting character interaction, when they team up to turn the film into a buddy movie toward the conclusion. Surprisingly, Bill Pullman's inspirational pep talk, just prior to the last-ditch desperate assault on the enemy, is quite effective and even moving; it's the one moment when what a character has to say is as interesting as the action that is about to be seen. (For a film dealing with a worldwide invasion—from a German-born director, no less—ID4 is surprisingly focused on the U.S., almost but not quite to the exclusion of all other nations. Yet this moment really does convey the proper sense of global unity.)

At its nearly epic running time, the film is not as tight as it should be, but at least it delivers on most of its promises. This is one summer blockbuster that earns its hype. □



John Travolta explores his new mental abilities in PHENOMENON.

not so over-the-top. ●● Jay Stevenson

PHENOMENON

Directed by Jon Turteltaub. Touchstone Pictures, 2/96. 124 mins. Rated PG. With: John Travolta, Kyra Sedgwick, Forest Whitaker, Jeffrey DeMunn.

Good premise, good performances, good characterization, and good direction don't make up for the lack of a good plot to tie all these elements together. Once Travolta's character is endowed with super mental powers, screenwriter George Gallo has no idea what to have him do. To a certain extent, this confusion is a part of the character, who is bewildered at the change in himself, but ultimately the film just grinds to a predictable conclusion (when all else fails, you can always signal the end by killing off your lead) that wastes some great potential.

●● Steve Biodrowski

SPY HARD

Directed by Rick Friedberg. Hollywood Pictures, 5/96. 80 mins. Rated PG-13. With: Leslie Nielsen, Nicollette Sheridan, Charles Durning, Barry Bostwick, Andy Griffith.

Leslie Nielsen mugs relentlessly in this weak attempt to do for spy movies what AIRPLANE did for the disaster genre. Too bad nobody realized that part of the humor of Zucker Brothers' comedies like POLICE SQUAD was derived from the deadpan approach of the actor. Director Friedberg employs the Zucker's scattergun, anything-for-a-laugh approach, tossing in references to PULP FICTION and BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID; unfortunately, nobody wrote any jokes for these scenes—we are supposed to laugh simply because we recognize the references. In fact, there are few jokes, period; the film mostly relies on silliness to generate laughter. The one good sight gag involves the use of the immediately identifiable Disney building (the one with the statues of the seven dwarves) as the supposedly "undercover" location of Nielsen's spy organization. Only the opening credit sequence, co-directed by Weird Al Yankovic who also sings the theme song, is a perfect parody of Bond clichés. With any luck, this will show up on MTV, saving you from having to sit through the whole film.

● Steve Biodrowski

Where's Frank?

By Dan Persons

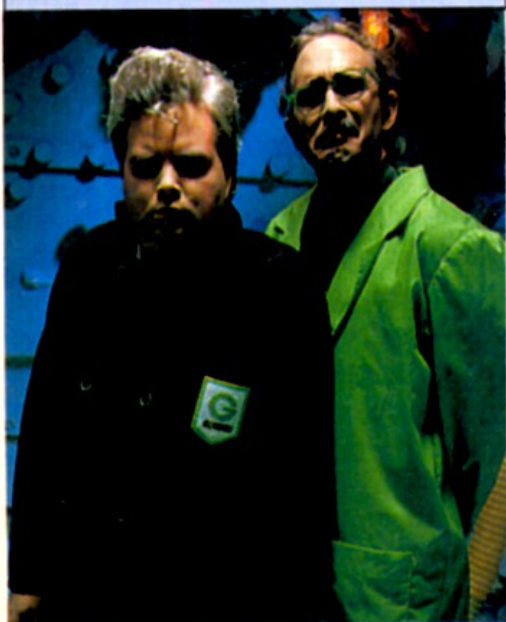
Ankling the role of "TV's Frank," the sidekick of Dr. Clayton Forrester, at the end of MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000's sixth season, comedian-writer Frank Conniff also bypassed the MST-3K feature. "I knew they were probably going to do the movie when I left," said Conniff. "I have no regrets. I'd done 109 episodes; I just wanted to move on."

Conniff joined up second season. "I was friends with Joel [Hodgson, the show's star and creator] and Mike Nelson and Trace Beaulieu, from doing stand-up comedy in Minneapolis," said Conniff. "When the second season came up, there was an opening, and they knew I was funny and a film buff. It made sense for me to come on-board."

Conniff quickly found himself synching up with his MST-3K compatriots. "The worse the film, the more fondness I have for it," he noted. "I liked the bottom-of-the-barrel stuff, like MANOS: THE HAND OF FATE and RACKET GIRLS. If a movie is going to be bad it should be really bad."

Conniff took the freelance route after leaving MST-3K, and moved to LA. At present, he is at work on scripts for Disney's upcoming revival of FRACTURED FAIRY TALES. Still to come is a co-starring role with Joel Hodgson in the MST-3K creator's low-budget, SF comedy feature STATICAL PLANETS (Frank plays "the most perfect man in the universe." Well...of course). Beyond that, Conniff discourages speculation that TV's Frank may yet burrow back down to Deep Thirteen for a return visit once the show resumes in February on the Sci-Fi Channel: "It's probably too soon to consider that. I don't know if I'd go back to doing it. I'd definitely like to work with those guys, again, though." □

Frank Conniff (below with Trace Beaulieu) left the show sixth season, before the feature.



MST-3K Earns Big Screen Laughs

MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000: THE MOVIE

A Gramercy Pictures release of a Best Brains production. Produced, directed by Jim Mallon. Screenplay, Michael J. Nelson, Trace Beaulieu, Mallon, Kevin Murphy, Mary Jo Pehl, Paul Chaplin, Bridget Jones, based on "Mystery Science Theater 3000," created by Joel Hodgson. Editor, Bill Johnson; music, Billy Barber; production design, Jef Maynard; set decoration, Blakesley Clapp; costume design, Linda Froiland; sound (DTS Stereo), Thomas A. Naunas; associate producers, Beaulieu, Murphy; assistant director, Marie Domingo. Rating: PG-13. Running time: 73 min.

Mike Nelson	.....	Michael J. Nelson
Dr. Clayton Forrester	.....	Trace Beaulieu
Tom Servo	.....	Kevin Murphy
Gypsy	.....	Jim Mallon
Crow T. Robot	.....	Trace Beaulieu
Benktorf	.....	John Brady

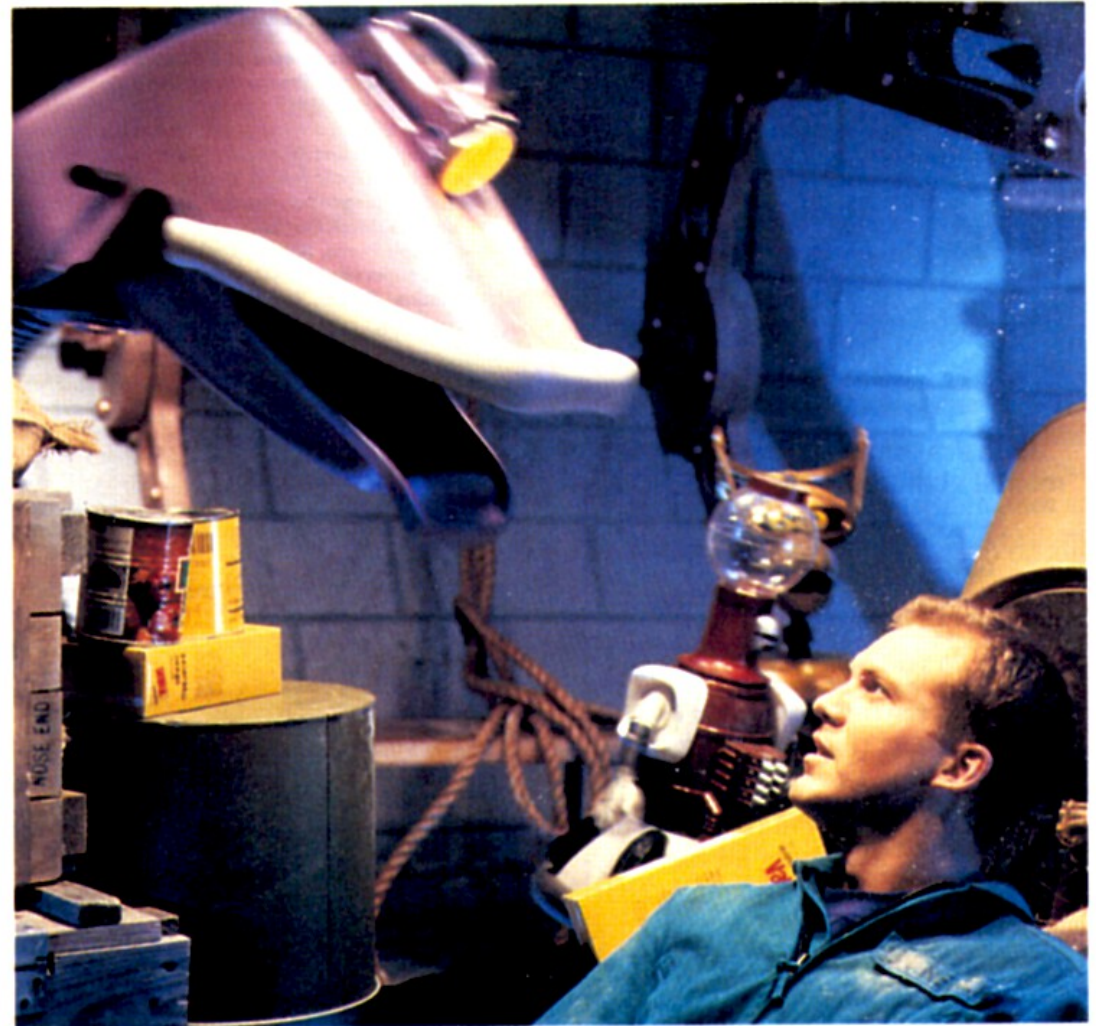
by Andrew Markowitz

The dialogue's a little raunchier; the special effects are a little better (but just a little); and we find out what Tom Servo's room looks like. But up there on the big screen, MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 is still MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000, and the world's a better place for it.

In a movie theater, MST-3K does lose a certain amount of living-room intimacy—it's not just your cult anymore. Then again, there's that extra level of post-mod winking: it's not just a TV show about a bunch of guys watching a bad movie; it's a movie about a bunch of guys watching a bad movie. And, like the TV show, MST3K: THE MOVIE is, at heart, about the cannabilization of modern culture. Mike, Crow, and Servo reach deep into the collective national memory bank, hauling out anything they can get their hands on to hurl at the screen: old movies and TV shows, politics and history, sex and drugs and rock-and-roll.

If they're clearly pitching here to a wider audience (slowed-down riffing, fart and crotch jokes, a target movie that won't send people running from the theater, a few too many George Takei impersonations), they remain doggedly obscurist and wide-ranging; the movie name-checks, among other things, NIELS BOHR, HAZEL, WILLY WONKA AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY, Yes album covers, Flemish painting, and the foreign takeover of Hollywood studios. ("Notice how big they made Japan," Mike quips as the familiar globe logo of Universal, now a division of Matshushita division, appears at the start of the chosen cinematic sacrifice, THIS ISLAND EARTH.) There's even an in-joke for the MSTies in attendance.

The production will be familiar to those who attended the 1994 MST



The MST-3K crew transfer their show into a fine, funny feature film, which was dumped on the market by Gramercy and is headed for video in October.

convention, at which THIS ISLAND EARTH was performed live in a Minneapolis theater. (A second con and live show are scheduled for Labor Day weekend.) For the movie, they've tightened the script; the jokes come thicker (and better) than they did in the stage version. There are at least a dozen solid belly laughs during the opening credits of THIS ISLAND EARTH. (My favorite: "Shatner, Shatner...doesn't look like he's in this one. We're safe.") You're lucky to find an entire movie with a record like that. For the first half-hour or so, not a minute goes by without Mike and the 'bots letting loose at least one big score.

Of course, THIS ISLAND EARTH is not the usual MST-3K turkey *du jour*, and part of what's interesting here is seeing how the Satellite of Love crew works its way around something that's a little out of their usual bailiwick. Here's a movie that was taken quite seriously in its day, with its stentorian script and then-oddball visuals, and the announcement that it would serve as MST fodder actually set off a mini-debate in sci-fi circles.

But, to be honest, like a lot of '50s sci-fi THIS ISLAND EARTH hasn't aged well, with its whiter-than-white stalwart-scientist hero confronting aliens with six-inch-high foreheads and shock-white pompadours ("the Buddy Ebsen society," the Satellite of

Love crew dubs them), mutant slave bugs, and Russell "the Professor" Johnson (whose appearance naturally unleashes a torrent of GILLIGAN'S ISLAND jokes). Viewed from the comforting plateau of 40 intervening years, THIS ISLAND EARTH is straight '50s kitsch, and—with no surreally bad production values to riff on—the MST crew greases its slide into postmod camp. If they err in their treatment, it's on the side of perhaps being a little too respectful. For the most part they refuse to stomp THIS ISLAND EARTH's dialogue, and this is one talky space opera. The result is some longish stretches with less back-talk and, consequently, fewer laughs. And, at a thin 74 minutes, the whole thing seems a tad rushed, as if the makers didn't have enough faith in their own shtick to stick it out a little further. (And—oh, greatest sin!—the TV-show theme song is nowhere to be heard.)

Then again, I quibble. MST3K: TM is a movie for the masses, not just the MSTies, and the former presumably won't miss what they haven't seen. By the measure of the TV show, this is a solid effort, with a high batting average on the jokes and a couple of pretty funny bumper skits. By any measure, it's a hoot and a howl. And, with the TV show picked up by the Sci-Fi Channel, it bodes well for the future of the franchise. □

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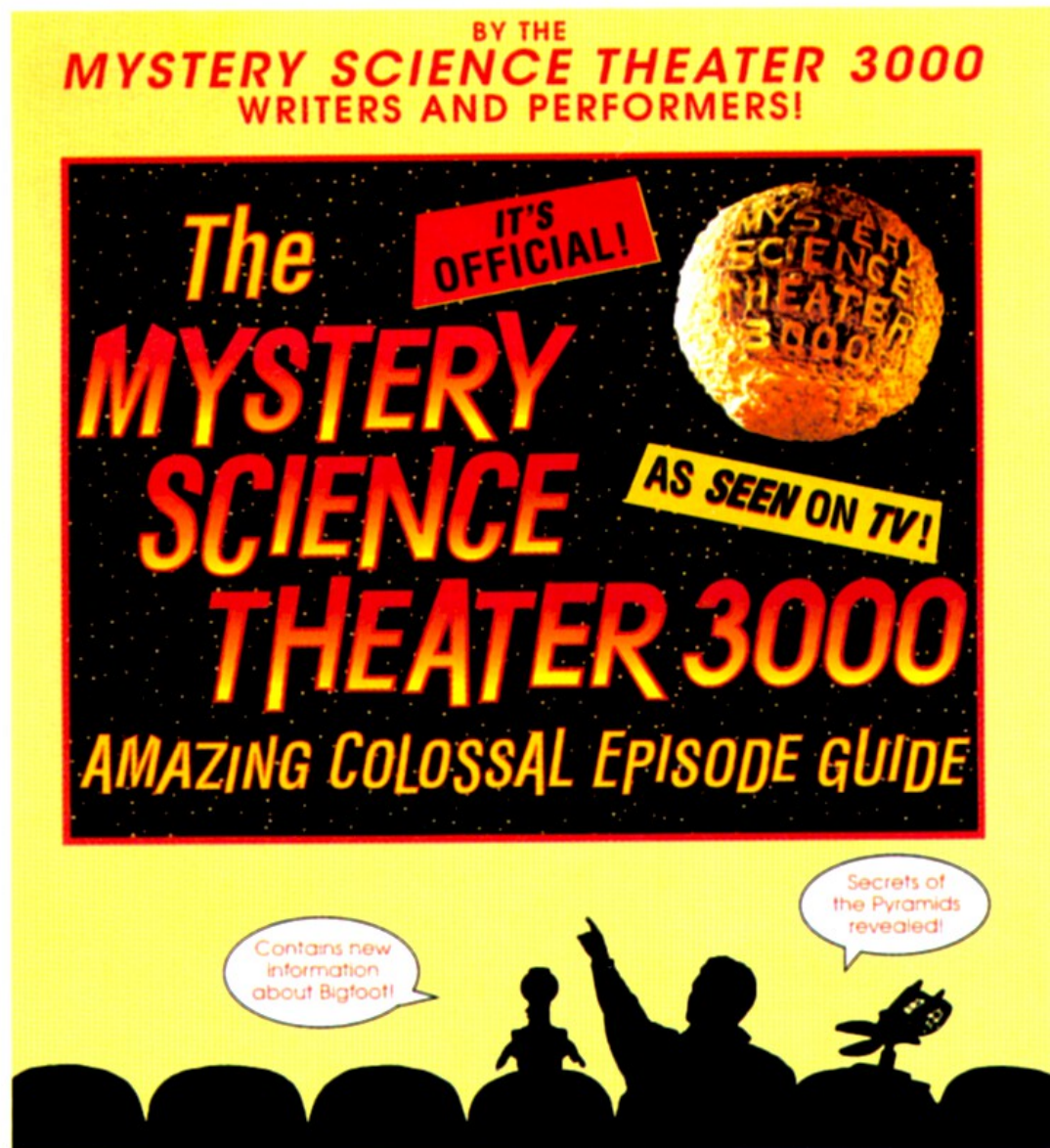
By Dan Cziraky

MST's AMAZING EPISODE GUIDE Unfortunately, it's not so amazing.

Hot on the heels of the release of *MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000: THE MOVIE* comes *The Mystery Science Theater 3000 Amazing Colossal Episode Guide* (Bantam Books, New York, \$16.95). If you love the show, you'll love the book. If, like me, you like the show but aren't a regular viewer or a rabid "MSTie," you might find it kind of lightweight and a tad disappointing.

Written by the MST-3K writers and performers, the book chronicles the show's early days, as well as listing all the episodes to date—as you might expect from the title. However, it lacks a central voice, and smacks of a hodge-podge, slapped-together-to-cash-in-while-we-still-can sort of project. It also lacks any sort of input from creator Joel Hodgson, who really was the heart of the show and starred for the first five seasons as Joel Robinson, the likable everyman trapped aboard the Satellite of Love by mad scientist Dr. Clayton Forrester (Trace Beaulieu) and forced to watch "cheesy movies" against his will. As an episode guide, it's pretty straightforward in its presentation, but there are precious few facts regarding the genesis of the show at KTMA in Minneapolis, where 22 episodes were produced before the series was picked up by Comedy Central. The Best Brains folks dismiss these early UHF shows as "bad," instead of presenting us with enough information to judge for ourselves. They also address the fact that they've asked Comedy Central not to repeat any of the shows from the first season, as they are "bad" as well. The book was written prior to the taping of season seven, so all we get is a list of the proposed films, as well as an introduction by writer-performer Mary Jo Pehl now that she picks the films that air (a job previously held by Frank Conniff, a.k.a. "TV's Frank," who left at the end of season six).

There is a lot of good material here, but it is parceled out in bits and pieces. For every great behind-the-scenes story, there is also some tedious fictional joke, presented as an anecdote, which pretends to amuse at the expense of telling us something interesting about the show. Also, it is sad to see that at least some of the staff at Best



Coinciding with the release of *MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000: THE MOVIE*, the cast and crew of the TV show put out an episode guide for the series.

Brains really do seem to deserve the reputation they have earned from bad-movie fans, who think that what MST-3K does is a disgrace to the hard work and efforts of those who made the films being trashed. Occasionally, the arrogance on view is tainted by outright ignorance as well.

An illustrative example is the attitude toward Roger Corman. In the entry for *THE GUNSLINGER* (1956), Kevin Murphy's derogatory comments suggest that he has never bothered to see any Corman films except those aired on MST-3K—it never occurs to him that the director's work might have improved as he gained more experience. One might forgive this oversight elsewhere, but it looks bad coming from a show that, according to the very people who worked on it, started off so badly that they don't want their own fans to see their early episodes. Let's face it: Jim Mallon's own directorial debut, the sporadically funny horror-comedy *BLOODHOOK*, would be perfect MST fodder if credited to anyone else; beside it, Corman's comedies, *BUCKET OF BLOOD* and *LIT-*

TLE SHOP OF HORRORS, look like works of genius.

Later in the book, Mary Jo Pehl objects to Corman's favorable reputation as a director, saying that it proceeds from his having given so many young directors their first jobs (Francis Coppola, Martin Scorsese, etc). We would like to point out to the obviously confused Pehl, that Corman's hiring policies as a *producer* have nothing whatsoever to do with the admiration he earned as a director; his work on *MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH* (1964) and *THE TOMB OF LIGEIA* (1965) is more than enough to overcome any bad memories of *IT CONQUERED THE WORLD* and *TEENAGE CAVEMAN*.

Overall, *The Mystery Science Theater 3000 Amazing Colossal Episode Guide* isn't nearly as amazing as the writers would have us believe, and, at 174 pages and only black and white photos, the only thing colossal about it is that \$16.95 price. For diehard MSTies only. □

Jay Stevenson contributed to this article (he really likes some of Roger Corman's films).

MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000: THE FINAL EPISODE

Directed by Jim Mallon. Gramercy, 5/96, 2 hrs. With: Mike Nelson, Kevin Murphy, Trace Beaulieu.

MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 went out with a blast—literally—as the show served up the '70s sci-fi quickie *LASERBLAST* for their May 18 swan-song on Comedy Central. Dr. Forrester (Trace Beaulieu) announces that his funding had been cut; therefore the Satellite of Love will be disconnected, whereupon its orbit will decay until it burns up on re-entry. When the 'bots protested that he had promised to return them to Earth, his glib reply was, "What did you expect? I'm evil!" As a farewell gesture, Forrester downloads the 1978 dud.

If you've never seen *LASERBLAST*, this is perfect MST-3K viewing! It typifies everything wrong with the late '70s. To be fair, it does feature some nifty stop-motion aliens by David Allen; otherwise, it's laughably amateurish. Kim Milford stars as a rebellious teen who finds an alien weapon and goes on a laserblasting rampage. Cheryl "Rainbeaux" Smith co-stars as his girlfriend, and B-movie vets Roddy McDowall (his name misspelled as "McDowell" in the credits) and Keenan Wynn take the money and run in small supporting roles.

During the commercial breaks, Gypsy (Jim Mallon) informs Mike and the 'bots that they can power up the satellite's engines to prevent their orbit from decaying, but they won't have any navigational control. Nelson slips into a Kate Mulgrew/*STAR TREK: VOYAGER* costume and gets the ship's controls back online. As the SOL careens through the galaxy, they encounter a field of Starbabies that need changing, so Mike sends Crow and Servo outside to do the job! During *LASERBLAST*'s closing credits, Mike and the 'bots go through Leonard Maltin's TV Movies and Video Guide to see what other films the critic gave two-and-a-half stars to (including one Oscar-winner). The SOL reaches the edge of the galaxy—where it stops, and Mike and the 'bots all become beings of pure energy. Dr. Forrester watches as an older version of himself has dinner alone at the Deep 13 lab, then sees a feeble, bed-ridden version of himself (placed by Trace's father, Jack Beaulieu) before a giant, monolithic videocassette with a label bearing the title *THE WORST MOVIE EVER MADE*, flanked by statues of Crow and Tom Servo. He then transforms into a mustachioed, bespectacled Starbaby, as Pearl cradles him and declares, "Oh, Clayton, we can start all over again!" The infant laments, "Oh, poopie!" as the show ends and the final credits roll. ●●● Dan Cziraky

Jerry Lewis on writing, directing, and starring in the original version of THE NUTTY PROFESSOR

By Steve Biodrowski

At least since the end of 1992, when I met him, Jerry Lewis had been proclaiming that he would star in a sequel to his own *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR* (1963), which he would write and direct for Disney. In fact, when the project turned up not as a sequel but a remake at Universal, a lawsuit resulted on behalf of Jeffrey Berlatsky and Jeffrey Weber, who were supposed to produce the Disney version; however, the suit was settled in time for the Eddie Murphy remake to proceed. (Lewis, on tour playing the Devil in the revival of *Damned Yankees*, has yet to see the new film.)

The original version of *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR* is probably Lewis's most well-regarded effort, at least in this country (the opinions of French critics are something else again!) Lewis had come to fame for his early efforts with Dean Martin, and it has become fashionable to suggest (as Pauline Kael did) that with *NUTTY PROFESSOR*, Lewis in a sense "reconstituted his former team, but now plays both halves." The suggestion that Professor Julius Kelp's alter ego, Buddy Love, is a caricature of Martin, is a familiar one to Lewis, who denies that his film is a metaphor for his relationship with the late singer. "I wrote *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*," declared Lewis, "with one thing in mind: if I could have used Dracula, Boris Karloff, Frankenstein, and all of the vicious people we know in the world—child molesters, wife abusers—I conjured up as much ugliness as I could, to make Buddy Love. My partner was the love affair of my life. He built me an empire. How could I not love him? We had the best ten years of any two men in the world. That's a terrible metaphor. I would never have done that. There are some people who are exceptionally analytical. The French are so fucking



Jerry Lewis (seen here with Stella Stevens) earned his greatest critical accolades in 1963, with the original version of *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*.

analytical that it's ridiculous! If I have a fat lady in a film, they think that as a child I was frightened by an 18-wheeler who touched my body, and I felt my mother wasn't there to support me, and since my mother was fat, I knock down fat ladies. Oh, spare me!"

One of the early inspirations for Lewis's surreal comic stylings was working with director Frank Tashlin, who was found of breaking the "reality" of a film with gimmicks and asides aimed through the proscenium arch at the audience. "He was a cartoonist," explained Lewis. "He taught me the importance of filming cartoon-style. Tashlin taught me that when he said, 'When the Road Runner is running down the road, and the coyote is chasing him and falls 700 feet, we don't then see him in the hospital, getting well with doctors and nurses; you just cut and see the coyote preparing to kill the Road Runner again.' Cartoons are magical because there's never medicine or bandages—it goes right to the next attempt to get that Road Runner. When I learned that from Frank, I was able to move my films better; I was able to move the *pace* better." As for Tashlin's breaking of the "fourth wall" to address

the audience directly, Lewis claimed, "I did that more than Frank did. Frank loved to tease the medium; I loved to break out of the proscenium, look at the audience, and say, 'This is not real.' I'm sure I learned that was possible from Frank's irreverent feeling about filmmaking."

Although predominantly a comedian, Lewis has dabbled in fanciful genre fare from time to time. Most recently, he appeared in the strange, dark comedy *FUNNY BONES* (1995), which utilized a fountain-of-youth type potion as a macguffin to drive the plot. More interesting was the surreal *ARIZONA DREAM*, with Johnny Depp, Faye Dunaway and Liv Tyler, from the award-winning Yugoslavian director Emir Kustarica. Unfortunately, this fine effort, shot in 1992, received minimal U.S. theatrical release last year after poor test marketing in 1994. "The whole movie was improvisation," Lewis recalled. "I think he shot enough material to make seven movies. The beginning was one thing; the middle was another, and the ending was another." This was a far-cry from the way Lewis himself handled his set back in his directing days "You sign onto a film, and you respect what the director wants. It's just strange to

come home to my family and say, 'I really don't know what we shot today, but he was satisfied.'" Having directed himself, was Lewis always ready with an opinion on how to straighten things out? "No, but he was very eager for me to help him, and we'd talk. We had a wonderful working relationship. I called him my 'Yugoslavian fruitcake,' and he called me his 'Jewish fruitcake.' When he got into things that were pretty bizarre and that I didn't understand, I said, 'Emir, I can't help you here, and I'm not about to sit down and do a rewrite for you, because you hired me as an actor. I wouldn't know where to begin with this thing.' He would do something and ask me, 'Did I get in trouble here?' I said, 'Emir, if I knew what the fuck you shot yesterday, and if I knew what you were planning tomorrow...' Any good director can only talk about the scene if he knows where it's coming from and where it's going to. So I would say, 'Protect yourself in the following way,' and he would make a shot so that in the editing process, if he got in trouble, he could always lift it and move on."

Why have Lewis's screen appearances grown sporadic since the end of the '60s? "Simply because I will not be a sociopath; I will not be a transvestite who commits matricide," explained Lewis, whose distaste for Alfred Hitchcock's *PSYCHO* is well documented in his own book, *The Total Film-Maker*. "You can see the scripts that have been sent to me in the last year"—he gestured to the piles around the room—"and there isn't a piece of work in there that I would put my body in."

"Garbage has been made in Hollywood for years, but [now] there's films I wouldn't allow my family and myself to look at. Yet when you see a film like *BASIC INSTINCT*, that's good filmmaking. If you don't allow the subject matter to turn your head, hey—it's a wonderful film! But when you see things like a desire to shock, that's not filmmaking. You can get any kid who delivers the UPS here today and say, 'Talk about cunts, two girls fucking one another, and a guy in love with his own son,' and you'll make a movie." □

THE NUTTY PROFESSOR

Directed by Tom Shadyac. Universal, 6/96. 95 mins, PG-13. With: Eddie Murphy, Jada Pinkett, James Coburn, Larry Miller.

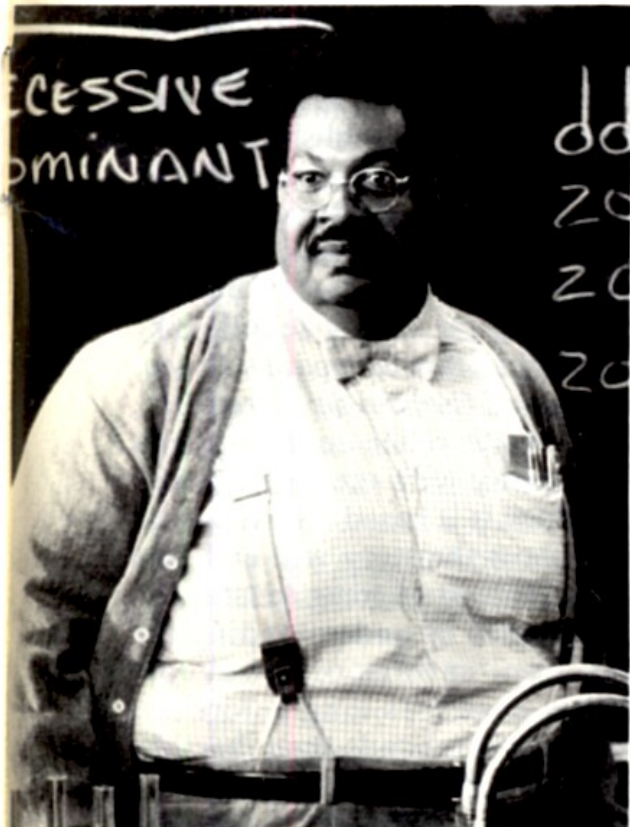
Eddie Murphy pulls off a completely unexpected career revival—at least in the boxoffice sense—with this remake of Jerry Lewis's most well-regarded film. Basically, the new film, written by David Sheffield, Barry W. Blaustein, director Tom Shadyac, Steve Oedekerck, and an uncredited Larry Gelbart, follows the original script by Lewis and Bill Richmond in general outline, with the obvious addition that this time the titular character (renamed "Sherman Klump") is obesely overweight.

The excess weight is milked for cheap laughs, but Murphy also uses it to engender sympathy for the character, making his transformation into Buddy Love an understandable, cathartic moment of triumph and revenge. In fact, the film's highlights are two sequences at a nightclub, before and after the transformation: in the first, we see the moment when minor embarrassment turns to outright humiliation at the hand of an abusive comic (Dave Chapelle) on-stage; in the second, Murphy has a field day, as his character not only turns the tables on the comic, but also wins the approval of the club's audience and Jada Pinkett's Carla Purty.

Unfortunately, these two scenes are more the exception than the rule. There are a couple of amusing nightmare-fantasy sequences, and the makeup and effects work and is often amazing, allowing Murphy to appear in multiple roles. Rick Baker's fat-suit makes the star convincingly overweight and completely unrecognizable: he truly submerges into the character, giving a convincingly moving performance. However, except for the weight gain, there is little new here, and the overall level of humor is embarrassingly crude, and time hasn't mitigated the sexism of the concept: Buddy Love is still effortlessly attractive to women, despite being obviously obnoxious, offensive, insensitive, and self-centered.

●1/2 Steve Biodrowski

Eddie Murphy (in the first of many roles) plays Dr. Sherman Klump in the remake of *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*.



ORIGINS

By Patricia Moir

In 1885, Robert Louis Stevenson awoke one night, trembling from a vivid nightmare, frightening his wife, and marking the beginning of one of the most enduring and fascinating works of literature from the 19th century. Writing furiously in a locked study to capture the details of his dream, Stevenson completed a first draft in just six days. In 1886, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was published, and the book was an instant sensation throughout England and North America.

The novella could not have appeared at a more appropriate time. It was a perfect reflection of the Victorian zeitgeist, poised between the relentlessly optimistic scientific materialism of the mid-century and the pessimism of the fin de siècle. Darwin's theory of evolution was, by this time, generally accepted, though popularly misinterpreted as a purely progressive phenomenon; Mr. Hyde's uncivilized, amoral will to survive recalled man's bestial origins and emphasized the importance of mastering one's animal nature. On the other hand, Dr. Jekyll's hypocrisy, his desire to enjoy Hyde's debaucheries without suffering the consequences, foreshadowed the coming revolution in psychoanalytic theory and the concept of the divided mind, superego and id, which, despite their opposing impulses, were indivisible and equally essential to the formation of the healthy individual personality.

Though not particularly well-written, Stevenson's novel still conveyed much of the surreal power of its dream origin. The gas-lit streets of London are described with eerie clarity, and Hyde's acts of violence are arbitrary, unexpected moments which punctuate a nightmarish atmosphere of continuous unease. Its short length, sensationalism, and firmly moralistic tone ensured its success with a broad range of Victorian readers, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* went on to become a lurid stage production based on a short theatrical adaptation by Thomas Russell Sullivan in 1887. Shortly afterward, a more literate stage version was written by Luella Forepaugh and George Fish, and played to packed houses intermittently for several decades thereafter.

The first film version of ap-

THE ON-SCREEN EVOLUTION... of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.



The 1932 version of the story, directed by Rouben Mamoulian and starring Frederick March, emphasized the Darwinian interpretation of Stevenson's tale.

peared in 1908, a short silent picture from the Polyscope Company. It was quickly followed by a half-dozen more silents in 1910, 1911, and 1913. As in the stage productions, the chief appeal to audiences lay in the climactic transformation scene. Although the less ambitious productions relied on cut away shots or had the transformations take place off-screen, the two 1913 versions utilized some special effects technologies. Carl Laemmle, of the newly formed Universal Film Manufacturing Company, produced a *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*, which featured a dissolving view of Jekyll's metamorphosis into Hyde, while the Kinemacolor Company released a version in color, which, because of the rather complicated projection equipment required for its screening, was not widely distributed.

It is the 1920 Paramount film, directed by John S. Robertson and starring John Barrymore, which remains the most memorable of all the *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE* silents. In it, Barrymore relies heavily on the stage techniques of bodily contortion and facial expression to convey the evil character of Hyde, an achievement of which he was justly proud. Barrymore's Hyde matches Stevenson's descriptions of the monster more closely than any other; he appears smaller than Jekyll, and has an air of deformity about him, although he is quite recognizably human. The story follows

Stevenson's plot in its broad outline, and retains all the primary characters of the original, but more than half of the story is drawn from another source: Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Wilde's infamous novel of corruption and retribution, about a young man who lives a life of sin without aging, while his portrait shows the ravages of his excesses, was first published in Lippincott's magazine in 1891, immediately firing up a public controversy which Wilde himself fueled by attacking his critics in print at every possible opportunity. At issue was the morality of the work, which, despite its moralistic finale, seemed to glamorize Dorian's decadent lifestyle. Moreover, the story had a distinctly homoerotic subtext, which was later toned down by Wilde when he expanded *Dorian Gray* to the novel-length version most familiar to readers today. The controversy did little to harm Wilde's reputation at the time, but the original version would come back to haunt him a few years later. The author's open affair with Lord Alfred Douglas, son of the Marquis of Queensberry, led to an ill-advised lawsuit, initiated by Wilde against the Marquis, for slander and defamation of character. The Marquis' defense exposed every seamy detail of Wilde's life at the trial, and brought up *Dorian Gray* as evidence of his immoral character.

Wilde lost, of course, and spent several years in jail, abandoned by virtually all his former associates. The proceedings of the trial were followed avidly by a public hungry to devour its daily revelations of prostitution, drug abuse, and Bohemian license.

It is important to remember that this huge scandal was no more remote from Barrymore's audience than, say, Watergate is from the audience of Oliver Stone's *NIXON*. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was, in 1920, still considered a morally questionable work, and was still being read and discussed. While Stevenson's Hyde is clearly an evil character, his activities in his Soho tenement hideaway are left deliberately vague; all we are told of explicitly are two incidents of violence: the trampling of a child in the street and the murder of an elderly MP, both random acts. The association of Hyde with Dorian Gray, and hence with Wilde, suggests other forms of degeneracy, and a perverse will to evil, rather than a mere animal lack of control. The film's Sir George Carew is portrayed in much the same fashion as Wilde's Sir Henry, who tempts the innocent Dorian into a life of sinful self-indulgence; he tells the respectable Jekyll, in a direct quote from Wilde, that "the only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it." Like Dorian, the Barrymore Jekyll repays his mentor by endangering the reputation of a female relative, as well as seducing and ruining a music-hall performer and frequenting opium dens. Most significant is the emphasis on the hypocrisy of both Dorian and the Jekyll of 1920. Both men are able to maintain the faces of innocence while their hidden selves, Dorian's portrait and Jekyll's Hyde, show the faces of the evil which they conceal within. Both make insincere, unsuccessful attempts to give up the freedoms made possible by their unique situations. Finally, Dorian's picture and the mirror in Jekyll's laboratory are the taunting reminders of their owners' true moral conditions, and it is only in acts of self-loathing suicide that they can destroy the monsters within themselves.

In 1932, Paramount released another *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*, directed by Rouben Mamoulian. Unlike the Robertson version, which had stressed the moral and spiritual aspects of Stevenson's book, Mamoulian chose to follow the novel's Darwinian themes. Leading man Fredric March, who received an Oscar for his performance, changes from a handsome young man to a Neanderthal monster



MGM's 1941 remake of Stevenson's tale starred Spencer Tracy in a Freudian interpretation of a Dr Jekyll who enjoys his alter ego Mr Hyde's escapades.

with sloping forehead, jutting teeth, and hairy hands, in the most ambitious transformation scene to that date. To convey Jekyll's dizziness and disorientation, Mamoulian had the camera revolve a full 360 degrees, not a common technique at the time, requiring a specially rigged camera and difficult lighting. March's makeup was applied in four stages to achieve the dissolves in which Hyde's teeth and nose grow larger and his face more deeply lined. Specially built gloves were initially tried for the hand transformations, but were finally rejected in favor of grease paint and artificial hair. The most elaborate aspect of the transformation, however, was the sound. Mamoulian mixed sounds at different speeds, run both forward and backward, and photographed candlelight of different intensities to transform the light frequencies directly into sound. The result is a mixture which is totally unnatural, to match the unnaturalness of Hyde's emergence. (Many of the same techniques were used decades later to achieve a similar effect in *THE EXORCIST*).

Thematically, the film differs sharply from its predecessors. The text subtly suggests that human nature has both a primitive but innocent side and a more sophisticated, intellectual side, the latter of which has the greater capacity for evil as well as the greater self-control. Thus, when Hyde is first liberated by Jekyll's serum, he is wild but not immoral. It is only with the influence of the more highly evolved intellect of modern man

that he learns to be cruel. Hyde becomes a combination of the worst of all parts of human nature, a willfully evil, unrestrained beast. Mamoulian later remarked on the enduring appeal of such themes of good intentions, scientific or otherwise, which go horribly astray. He noted that Jekyll's experiments, which were intended to liberate the higher side of his human nature, had just the opposite effect, magnifying his worst qualities; Mamoulian suggested that for viewers in later decades, the story might be read as a metaphor for the use of mind-expanding drugs.

In 1941, MGM released yet another *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*, this time with a stellar cast led by Spencer Tracy and Ingrid Bergman. Tracy was unhappy about having to play the part in heavy makeup, and later considered the film to be an embarrassment, but his judgment was harsher than the work deserved. Tracy, under the direction of Victor Fleming, gives a creditable performance, as does Bergman as the scarlet woman who becomes Hyde's victim. This time the emphasis is on Freudian sexuality, with Hyde living out the repressed desires of the good Victorian doctor.

During the 1950s, the horrors of fog and gaslight gave way to the terrors of the atomic age, and Dr. Jekyll and his alter ego fell out of favor until Hammer Films' gothic revival of the 1960s. *THE TWO FACES OF DR. JEKYLL* (1960) took a novel approach to the familiar tale, portraying Hyde as a handsome, Dorian Gray-like fig-

ure. While all previous films had exaggerated the physically repellent appearance of Hyde beyond Stevenson's description, this early Hammer effort shifts the emphasis away from looks and onto purely moral ground. The face of evil is no longer recognizable; it is, in fact, more beautiful than the face of good. Even Dorian Gray had his portrait, but this Hyde is simply attractive, and all the more dangerous for it. *THE TWO FACES OF DR. JEKYLL* is not a very good film, but it was a truly original take on the story, which was beginning to show signs of age.

Stevenson's novel had already been lampooned in *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE* in 1952, and Jerry Lewis tried out the role in 1963's *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*. Warner cartoons featured takeoffs on the story, which had already lost much of its power to frighten adults. A 1968 version of *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*, starring Jack Palance, more or less disappeared without a trace, although it deserved better. Palance plays Hyde as a charismatic, energetic sadist, an aristocrat whose character owes as much to the story of Jack the Ripper as to Stevenson.

Christopher Lee appeared in a *Jekyll and Hyde*-inspired film, Amicus' *I, MONSTER* (1970), along with Peter Cushing. The following year, Hammer released *DR. JEKYLL AND SISTER HYDE*, a bizarre variation in which the doctor's (Ralph Bates) potion transforms him into an alluring woman (Martine Beswick) with a murderous hatred of prostitutes. The associations with the Jack the Ripper legend and its Freudian pretensions are too blatant to be anything but tongue-in-cheek, and the film still works rather well as a parody of its genre. Unfortunately, it was to remain the last memorable version of Stevenson's tale for two decades.

In 1990, Valerie Martin's novel *Mary Reilly* was published to wide critical acclaim. Martin's book is the first-person narrative of Victorian housemaid Reilly, who has had the bad fortune to be employed by Dr. Henry Jekyll. Like playwright Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Mary Reilly* relies on the reader's familiarity with the earlier work on which it is based. We know exactly how the story will end, and there is a sort of smug satisfaction that comes of understanding the full implications of the events Reilly describes long before she fully comprehends them herself. But *Mary Reilly* is more than just a novel with a gimmick. It is a com-

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passionate study of Victorian servant life, the endless rounds of backbreaking labor and the exaggerated class consciousness which determined virtually every action. Mary Reilly is a heartbreakingly convincing character, an intelligent woman doomed by birth to a life of virtual invisibility. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are less important than her conceptions of them, the doctor representing a level of dignity and kindness of which she has hardly dared to dream, Hyde the meanness and horror of the cruel slum life she has escaped. The novel is an ironic but never cynical study of the emotional scars which have the capacity to make human beings both weaker and more noble.

In the right hands, this novel might have made a truly fine film, one which, while taking an entirely new direction, could have restored interest in Stevenson's original tale. Unfortunately, both the screenplay and casting of this year's MARY REILLY fail to live up to the standards set by Martin's novel. As if to add insult to injury, the film's debut in theatres coincided with the video release of the unbelievably bad DR. JEKYLL AND MS. HYDE, easily the worst film ever to be based on the Jekyll-and-Hyde scenario. Stevenson's tragic doctor and his evil counterpart deserve so much better. The strange story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde still has the

power to thrill readers in print; hopefully, it won't be too long before we see a film which can combine today's cinema technology with the dramatic strength of the 1920 and 1932 productions.

HUNCHBACK

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villain's torn conscience.

HUNCHBACK is not completely ruled by such ominous imagery. Directors Wise and Trousdale have taken full advantage of the boundless world of animation in order to punch up the fun factor. There are, of course, Quasimodo's three sidekicks: Victor, Hugo, and Laverne (Charles Kimbrough, Jason Alexander and Mary Wickes)—the Gargoyles who spring to life solely for "Quasi's" enjoyment. With their sawed-off, granite bodies, the three comic reliefs are not only great-looking characters (and a marketing dream!), but they are used so well in the story that never once do they feel like a Disney imposition on Hugo's work.

The filmmakers also have heightened and exaggerated the action. The "Festival of Fools" is a great example of animation pyrotechnics and the perfect excuse for the song, "Topsy Turvey." Using quick cuts and moments of sly, animation trickery, the Disney animators prove that they've become quite adept at the show stopper. "Topsy Turvey" is one of a stag-

gering eight songs in HUNCHBACK, all of them weaved intricately into the story by Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz, who once again validate what was suggested years ago: animation truly is the last place for Broadway style movie musicals.

The entire production is an example of art and storytelling at its finest and yet, many people feel THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME is inappropriate for animation and that the medium should stick to fairy tales and talking animals. But hey, everyone has to grow up sometime.

CRASH

continued from page 9

CRASH in the same traditional category as H.G. Wells, who looked beyond existing technologies to where they would lead."

He continued, "But if you look beyond the automobile, it could be about any technology: telecommunications, computer.... CRASH is about a sense of velocity and how that comes to play in our lives. It serves us, or we serve it. Cronenberg's concern in CRASH is how sex will change. That's discussed within the context of the material, anyway. If you think about it, the redefinition and reinvention of sex in our lifetime has been enormous. The sexual world we have created for ourselves has been so volatile and tumultuous—it's certainly a

different place today than it was eight years ago when we made SEX, LIES AND VIDEOTAPE, which dealt in other ways with the subject. CRASH takes cinematic sex to another level of newness. How sex would change, evolve and transform was something we discussed a lot with Cronenberg."

The polarized "love it/hate it" views of CRASH don't phase Spader. He feels it comes with the territory the movie tries to navigate. "Some people want to participate in what it's trying to say; others don't. Even when I was working on it my responses kept being conflicted. Most of the time I was completely exhilarated and tantalized by it—I thought I'd reached the wall of complete discovery, but then I'd find a secret door in that wall and enter a new level. You see, what Cronenberg is asking audiences to do, and what they don't like doing, is to speak in a film language that is new and unfamiliar. I am fascinated by people's passionate responses to it. No one has been indifferent, and you can't get a much more freakish environment than the Cannes Festival. How many people see a film like this and are then forced to discuss it for days after? Provocation is what the characters in CRASH were looking for—a taboo something that demanded a reaction and a connection. And the movie brilliantly invokes that same reaction, too."

THE BLESSING WAY

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his name. When Mulder demands to know if his father had had chosen between the two of them, Mrs. Mulder blurts out that Bill had chosen Samantha to be abducted. The idea of the trade, Carter said, "was originally suggested by David Duchovny. It's character-altering. It's like finding out that your parents are not your parents. It's frightening to find that people you thought had always loved you and acted one way, ultimately act in another way. Everything upon which you built your foundation of belief has to be reassessed."

"Paper Clip" ends upon a scene of profound sadness, with Mulder, newly aware of secrets in his past, attempting to comfort a bereaved Scully, sitting before the empty hospital bed once occupied by her sister. Mulder's statement that their work is not about justice but fate, was a philosophy that Carter felt "was very Mulder-like. Some people took issue with that. They believe that we are all captains of our ship and we have free will. But Mulder believes in the idea that there is fate, and if character is fate, that there are some things out of our control." □

NISEI

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Scully would come upon these women who had experiences which mirrored what had happened to Scully," Carter said. Scully was "creeped out," he noted. "Imagine if people—perfect strangers—knew more about you than you knew and were telling you what you had experienced, something you were possibly trying to deny but couldn't, especially with all these women taking these little implants out of their purses. I thought [director] David Nutter did a great job with this scene."

At the end of "731," Scully observes bitterly that what the conspiracy "can't cover, they apologize for." Her conviction that "Apology is Policy" replaces the episode's usual "The Truth is Out There" in opening title sequence. This is only the fourth time Carter has made such a substitution, inspired by his indignation when he heard that the president had apologized for radiation experiments conducted by government doctors in the 1950s. "I don't want these to become bumper stickers," he said. "I don't do it just to turn a clever phrase. I do it only when I think it has some greater resonance. It's reprehensible the way that governments and nations will commit the most heinous acts and then years later just apologize for it, as if that makes up for it. We took what is in



"Published accounts of Men In Black are actually more ridiculous than what I had in the episode," said Darin Morgan of "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space.'" □

fact a very topical piece of news, this apology by the president, which is a real thing, and we had Scully extrapolating that this is what's going on, and they were using Mulder to float this story."

But even in a two-parter as deadly serious as "Nisei" and "731," there is room for humor. Mulder launches a few wisecracks, including David Duchovny's ad-lib, "Scully, let me tell you, you haven't seen America till you've seen it from a train." Best of all is Scully's sarcasm at the beginning of "Nisei," when Mulder shows her what he believes to be an alien autopsy video. The suspicious Scully snaps that it's even hokier than the Fox Network's alien autopsy video. "They let us do it," Carter said. "I expected a fight and I didn't get one. Turns out they have a better sense of humor than that." □

ACADEMIC X-FILES

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as an example of a person trying to "sort out her beliefs and professional life in an increasingly confusing world. She's trying to juggle personal belief in a religion and personal belief in the scientific world view while analyzing the occult, the supernatural, and the paranormal. She's like most of us, trying to sort information in a world surfeited with it. Mulder's also trying to find himself. He's intriguing because he's so open and yet so closed. Explanations don't seem to interest him, and it didn't seem all that surprising that he came off as the skeptic in 'Revelations.' The comparison of Mulder to Ahab in 'Quagmire' was a good one; one wonders if Scully is due to get upgraded to Ishmael from Starbuck."

THE X-FILES breaks through the limitations imposed by labels such as "horror" or "science fiction." Rochester states that THE X-FILES is "the best thing on television in its genre, and I'd say that

the genre is 'drama,' as opposed to science fiction. The only thing I can find to compare it to is THE PRISONER, which matches it for subtlety of scriptwriting. The fact is that attempts to duplicate THE X-FILES have bombed or been only marginally successful. People don't like it because they're obsessed with alien invasion or government conspiracy or paranormal phenomenon; they like it because it's good TV."

Take away all the jargon, however, and what it comes down to is that these scholars appreciate finding something on television that not only entertains them, but speaks to them as people who are as passionate about their literary investigations and analysis as Mulder and Scully are about their own work. "It's a show you have to watch carefully and faithfully, much like tackling Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* or Shakespeare's tragedies," Cartwright concluded. "They both take thought, dedication, and time, things that typical TV viewers—especially those of 'fluff' like sitcoms and news magazines—don't engage in. Most other television shows don't demand that of its viewers. THE X-FILES does, and for its efforts has tapped into the largest unused resource in the TV audience—the intelligent, questioning viewer."

Added Ph.D. folklorist Leslie Jones, "Claude Levi-Strauss said that myths are 'good to think with.' THE X-FILES is good to think with." □

DARIN MORGAN

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video hosted by the Stupendous Yappi, his fake psychic from "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose."

The episode ends on a poignant note, with José Chung wistfully reading from his book that "in our own separate ways, on this planet, we are all... alone." "It was quite touching," Morgan remarked. "It

felt right. I didn't want to end on a wacky note. The scene is humorous, but you also have certain points or feelings you like to express, and I guess the loneliness of human existence was one of the them. When Chung goes on about how some people don't care about extraterrestrials, that is, I guess, my own summation about working on the show. I want to write about people rather than about aliens."

"Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space'" is so confusing that one's initial reaction, besides laughter, is to rewind the VCR and watch it again—precisely the effect Morgan wanted. "I think it worked, for the most part, and even if people are confused—because it is confusing, and purposely so—I hope that they would recognize that for being part of it and enjoy it even more. I just want to get a reaction. I don't care if they learned anything or got anything out of it. I hope they thought it was funny and moving, and were entertained on whatever level they needed."

After the X-FILES's third season, Darin Morgan left the show, burned out by the relentless pace of writing for television. "I did only four episodes, but they took a lot out of me," he said. "There's still a chance I might come back and write another one, but right now I have certain things I would rather write, rather than a couple more Mulder and Scully stories. I want to do something that's more romantic-comedy, rather than those scary things." □

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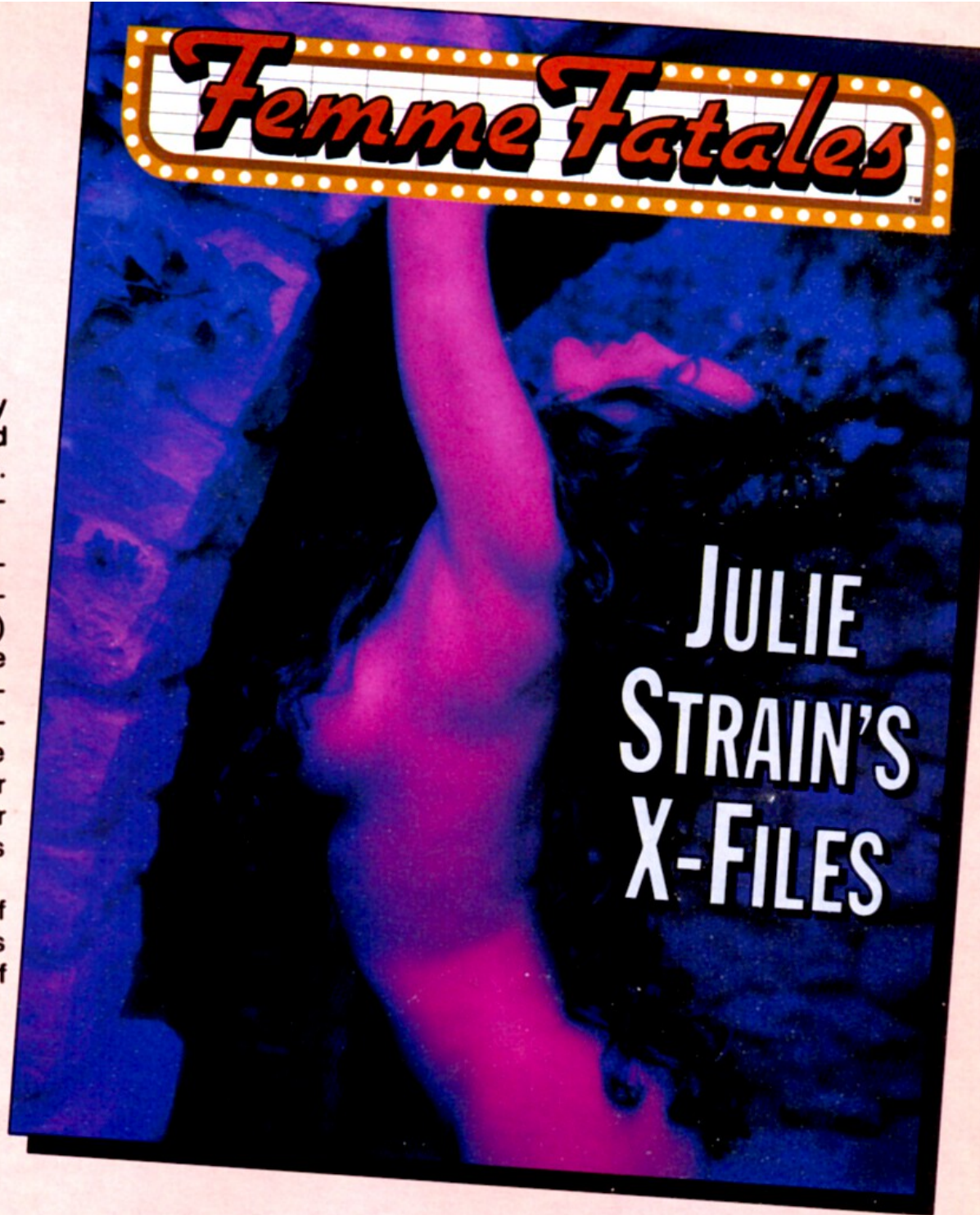
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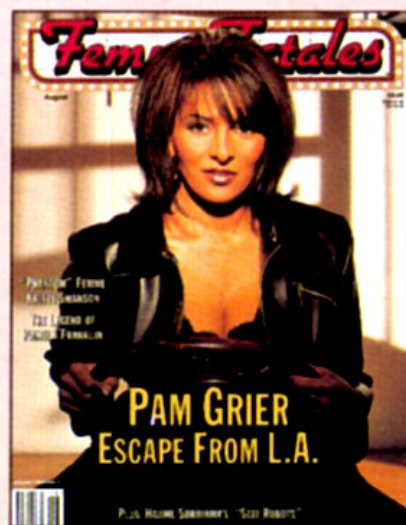
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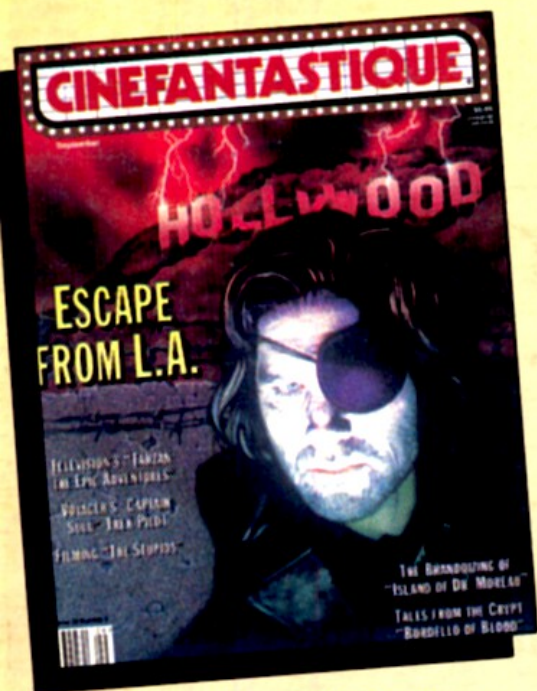
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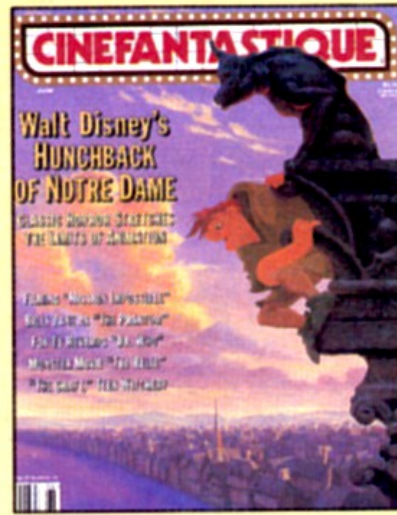
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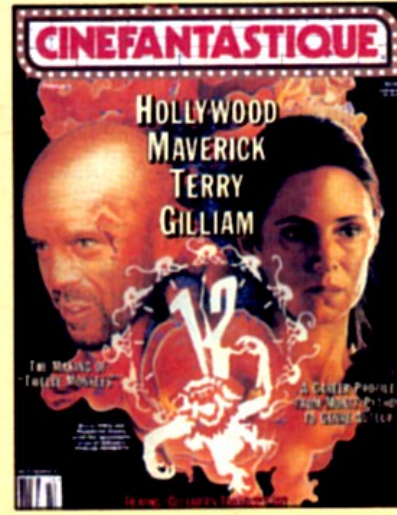
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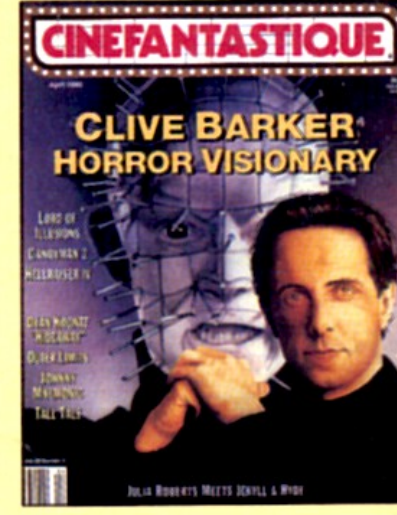
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